THE WAY OF PRAYER

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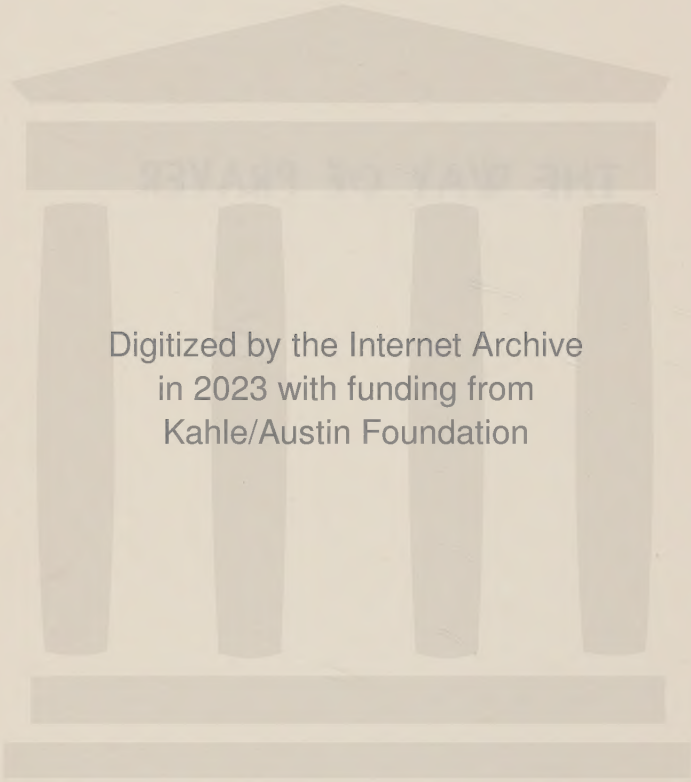

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A Commentary on St. Teresa's "Way of Perfection"

by

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Part I

Saint Teresa's Idea

I

THE "WAY OF PERFECTION"

In none of her other works did St. Teresa portray more clearly and sublimely the contemplative ideal of intimacy with God as it employs prayer and penance for an apostolic purpose.

St. Teresa was given the mission to teach the way to contemplative prayer and to restore to Carmel its ideal of prayer. So, with that practicality mystics have, she interested a few individuals and began a reform. Her nuns, seeing her so favored in prayer, asked her to teach them to pray . . .

Now, although the Saint inaugurated a reform in her Order, she also gave a new idea to all Christians. She taught that contemplative prayer should be aimed entirely at the apostolate. Her innovation was to unite not only prayer and the apostolate, but contemplation and the apostolate; for contemplation is a particular kind of prayer, which tends toward the most sublime intimacy with Our Lord.

No one can doubt that a contemplative person, as a friend of God, has power over His Heart; St. Teresa aimed at raising an army of contemplatives to aid the Church.

Seeing St. Teresa at prayer was enough to make one desire contemplation; that was why her first companions asked her to teach them the way to it. The apostles made the same request of Jesus: "Teach us to pray" (Luke XI). Jesus answered by teaching the *Pater noster;* St. Teresa responded through this book, which contains her commentary upon that great prayer. It is not surprising that St. Teresa answered as Jesus did, since the saints are dynamic members of the Mystical Body of Christ, sharing His life most intimately.

As St. Luke reports, and also St. Matthew, but more at length, in the sermon on the mount, Jesus first taught the dispositions for prayer, then what we should ask for.

The dispositions are: ". . . when thou are praying, go into thy inner room and shut the door upon thyself, and so pray to thy Father in secret; and then thy Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward thee" (Matt. VI, 6). When Christ teaches prayer, He insists upon quiet retirement in order to pray well. Away from creatures one can speak in secret and in secret the Father can answer. St. Teresa said that God speaks to the heart when it is the heart that prays, and that the more perfect prayer becomes, the more silent it is.

Then Jesus taught what we should ask: in this solitude pray thus: "Our Father Who art in heaven . . ."

And what did St. Teresa do but repeat this teaching? She wrote for those who seek contemplation. So, the first part of her book explains how the necessary disposition for it is to create in oneself the atmosphere of solitude through the practice of fraternal charity, detachment, and humility. " . . . If you had asked me about meditation, I could have talked to you about it, and advised you all to practise it, even if you do not possess the virtues. For this is the first step to be taken towards the acquisition of the virtues. . . But contemplation, daughters, is another matter."[1] Like Jesus, she said detachment is necessary, but she said it in a way especially directed to contemplatives. Then, like Jesus, she gave the prayer itself, and taught how to recite the Our Father.

* * *

In the first chapters Teresa sketched the contemplative ideal and showed that it is the traditional ideal of the Carmelite Order. Then she taught the practice of prayer, commenting on the Our Father and using it to portray a whole lifetime of prayer. Vocal prayer, she began, should be an intimate contact with God, an intimacy that trusts in the heavenly Father. In her pages on the first words of the *Pater,* she noted the childlike atmosphere Jesus created when He taught us to say "Our Father" to God. "Who art in heaven": here she taught the prayer of recollection, wherein one seeks a deep awareness of God's indwelling within him. The prayer of recollection is the most intimate prayer which we can reach by our own efforts; in it one puts himself at God's disposal. Then Our Lord, in the prayer of quiet, enters the soul, and, in the prayer of union,

[1] St. Teresa of Jesus, *Way of Perfection,* Ch. XVI.

draws the person to Himself. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done": the Saint recalled that these two things must go together if we want God to take possession of us through the prayer of quiet and of union. And if He takes possession of us, He also gives Himself to us. He enters the soul by the door of the will, so she added: "Let us give Him once and for all the jewel which we have so often undertaken to give Him."[2] And she reminded us that giving to God is bound to be painful; but she knew how to make us esteem suffering: "You see . . . what God gave to His best Beloved . . . He gives more to those whom He loves most . . . "[3] And the braver He sees a person, the more He gives him to suffer: "He gives in accordance with the courage which He sees that each of us has and the love we bear to His Majesty." One who reaches the last mansions of the *Interior Castle* offers himself to God; God gives Himself more and more in return—these are the rich graces of the union of conformity. Then, when the soul's gift really becomes complete, God takes possession of it. This is the union St. John of the Cross calls "transfiguring union". This is how Teresa sketched the path to union with God, begun by us with the gift of the will, and His gradual approach to us in order to take possession of us and draw us to Himself.

We need strength to make this gift a complete one, since it does involve suffering: "Give us this day our daily bread," bread to strengthen the soul. "Forgive us our trespasses": what need of pardon those living in intimacy with God always have! It is easy to fall into many little faults, but the contemplative is the one who tries hardest to avoid them, especially those of charity or forgiveness of small acts of discourtesy. "As we forgive those who trespass against us": a contemplative does not take offense if people fail to heed him. And then, since we carry our treasure in fragile vessels, we need protection: "Lead us not into temptation." The Saint taught that the safeguard against temptation is the love and fear of God.[4] St. John of the Cross defined this fear as the perfect fear of the child, born of love for the Father.[5] In order not to displease his heavenly Father,

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[2] Ibid., XXXII.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., XL.
[5] St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, XXVI, 3.

a son of God looks where he is going and seeks guidance to keep from leaving the right road. "But deliver us from evil," from this earth, to go where good alone reigns. But even here we must have an attitude of the greatest abandonment. "I am so subject to His divine will that I desire neither to live nor to die," said the Saint, though she longed for God, especially in those moments when she glimpsed "through the lattices" a still greater love awaiting her. "If I desire death, it is only in those brief moments when I am burning to see God."[6]

Hence in St. Teresa's writings we have a contemplative commentary on the Our Father, showing how persons sincere in leading the interior life might become contemplatives, or, better still, intimate friends of God who draw down graces upon the Church.

THE DIFFERENT MANUSCRIPTS

When she wrote the *Way of Perfection,* St. Teresa was concerned only with her little convent in Avila and wrote only for that small group, for she had no thought of any other foundation. But then (1567) the General of the Order saw how useful it would be for Teresa's work to spread and ordered her to found other convents. She left that very year for Medina del Campo and took her *Way of Perfection* with her. But the Avila nuns must have insisted so strongly on having the first copy back, that Teresa made another in her own hand. So there are two autographs of the *Way of Perfection:* one written at St. Joseph's of Avila which is preserved at the Escorial with many other of the Saint's manuscripts, and the other at the Carmelite convent in Valladolid.

The latter, which seems to have been written not later than 1569, differs somewhat from the first. Comparing the texts we see that the first is more familiar in style, the second more accurate; but it is also evident that the Saint had the first manuscript before her when she wrote the second. But, since she had composed it herself, she changed it freely; intuitive as she was, she could not refrain from improving it as her thought developed. The first was directed to her daughters at St. Joseph's in Avila;

[6] St. Teresa of Jesus, *Spiritual Relations,* VI.

now she wrote with an eye to the foundations of the future, and almost in spite of herself, to all who long for the fountain of living water.

St. Teresa also corrected and signed copies that were made later, and a number of these still exist. Then, there is an unsigned manuscript (at Toledo) which contains many important corrections because it was slated for the printers. A friend of hers, who esteemed her writings, Don Teutonio de Braganza, Archbishop of Evora, promised to edit it, as we gather from a letter of the Saint's accompanying the manuscript. She adds that it was one of the most intelligent of her nuns who helped prepare this manuscript. In 1580 Don Teutonio checked the printer's proofs, but St. Teresa did not have the consolation of seeing her work published, for it saw the light only in 1583, the year after her death. Two years later there was a second edition directed by Father Gracian. The Valencian edition followed (1586), and in 1588 the complete edition of her *Works* by Luis de Leon appeared. Then it spread to other countries, translated first into French, later into Italian. Up to our own day there has been a continual succession of translations.

The autographs (Escorial, Valladolid and Toledo) differ somewhat from each other. That of Valladolid is arranged best. Though it has forty-four chapters, there are only forty-two in modern editions; a note in the Toledo manuscript after chapter IV reads: "there should not be a chapter here", and also because Teresa tore some pages out of the Valladolid manuscript—those on the game of chess, formerly Chapter XVII; this leaves forty-two chapters. Later we shall discuss Teresa's reasons for removing Chapter XVII. Later editors took it from the Escorial manuscript and reinserted it, since it does throw much light on the concept of the *Way of Perfection.*

If Carmel's Reformer wrote two copies of the *Way of Perfection* herself and then had other copies made and herself checked them, it is because she considered the book important. So aware was she of its value that, wishing to follow the Church's teaching in everything, she had it examined by eminent theologians, among them Spain's greatest at the time, Dominic Banez. Her future biographer, Yepes, also examined it and to him she confided one day that a theologian had told her that her writing "seemed to be Sacred Scripture" (that is, in it one felt divine inspiration!). It was the humble Teresa who spoke thus, the humble Teresa who knew she was nothing but knew also how

mercy loves to stoop to little ones: "The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever!" was a favorite ejaculation of hers. In the humble little book she had written not for herself but for her daughters, God had helped her, and she realized that it had divine inspiration: not the kind recognized by the Church for Sacred Scripture, yet real inspiration. God did not allow her to see the little work printed, but He did give her the joy of having it approved and praised by learned theologians.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

In this work St. Teresa included all the elements of Carmelite education and all the aspects of a life based on prayer. The first three chapters are complete in themselves and give a general view of the ideal of Teresa's Reform. All the rest of the book indicates the road to perfection and invites the traveller to the fountain of living water (i.e. contemplation).

From the fourth to the fifteenth chapters Teresa wrote about the necessary moral foundation, which is the practice of heroic virtue leading to total detachment and complete gift of self. This is the only atmosphere in which contemplation can develop. Next comes a part—Chapters XVI to XXV—which might be entitled "the prayer which leads to contemplation". Here the Saint insisted on two points: (1) we must resolve to search for the fountain of living water all our life, and (2) mental prayer should always be a spiritual contact with God.

With Chapter XXVI she came to particulars and began to comment on the petitions of the *Pater noster,* explaining the various degrees of prayer until the end of Chapter XXXI. But when she wrote about the words: *Fiat voluntas tua,* though she continued to comment on the Pater, she went back to speaking of the perfect life which should accompany prayer so that it may be fruitful; she continued writing in this vein to the end of the book.

II

CARMEL'S APOSTOLATE

In the first three chapters of the *Way of Perfection* St. Teresa set forth the apostolic side of Carmel's vocation. But she did not forget its traditional contemplative ideal: to offer God a love-filled heart prepared to receive from Him the gift of contemplation. She knew this ideal well and set it before her daughters early in the book, for it is the goal of the way of perfection she was describing. In doing so, however, she brought it out in its relationship to their apostolic duties. Never before had these obligations been expressed so vigorously.

Carmel, today a mendicant Order, was originally purely contemplative. The apostolate was always present, of course, but the way it developed when the Order came to the West and was numbered among the mendicants, served to emphasize the Order's apostolic duties. St. Teresa recognized this and responded by teaching the virtues characteristic of the mendicant life.

What are the mendicant Orders in the Church? They are the Orders which add the active life to the search for union with God. They are the Orders of mixed life, and in theological language they are also called apostolic Orders because such was precisely the life of the Apostles, to whom they look for example in their work for souls. Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, Servites, Carmelites are all members of apostolic Orders. They are called *mendicant* because they introduced into the Church (in the thirteenth century) a new form of religious life based on a more austere poverty, even in common, than had been practised up to them. The ancient monks did renounce private ownership, but in common they had considerable possessions. The mendicant Orders renounced possessions even in common or reduced them to a minimum, to be freer for the service of souls to which the Church called them. They lived on alms from the faithful, but they repaid the faithful by preaching and administering the sacraments.

This definition of mendicant Orders casts light on the first three chapters of the *Way of Perfection*. The first and third

speak directly of the apostolic vocation based on union of the soul with God; the third insists in particular on a proximate object of the apostolate: prayer and penance on behalf of priests, theologians, preachers, confessors, etc. The second chapter is not a digression, as it might appear at first sight, for it goes back to one of the basic principles of Carmelite life: the poverty which is a necessary part of apostolic life.

CONTEMPLATION AND APOSTOLATE

The title of the first chapter, "The reason which moved (her) to found this convent in such strict observance", does not indicate the whole content of the chapter, but only the underlying thought, that is, an urgent desire to save souls. In other words, the apostolic ideal motivated St. Teresa to give her Order its austere character.

* * *

Carmel, eremitical in its origin, had become an apostolic Order by the will of the Pope when it came to Europe. After this change it strove to balance the different elements making up its life, and various reforms within the Order show that such balancing was not easy.

St. Teresa's reform—like several other reforms of the Carmelite Order—was a return to a more intense contemplative life; but her love for the ancient contemplative ideal did not make the Saint forget that her Order was an apostolic one. God had given her great love for souls and deep pity for those living in sin. The vision of hell she had before writing this work further sharpened these sentiments.[1] So it was to be expected that she would insist on the apostolate when teaching her daughters the fundamentals of their life.

"When this convent was originally founded . . . it was not my intention that there should be so much austerity in external matters, nor that it should have no regular income: on the contrary, I should have liked there to be no possibility of want. I

[1] Let us note that when St. Teresa says she wishes to return to the primitive Rule in her Reform, she does not mean the Rule of St. Albert (1209) which was exclusively contemplative, but the rule of Pope Innocent (1247), which states the organization of Carmel now become a mendicant, apostolic Order.

acted, in short, like the weak and wretched woman that I am, although I did so with good intentions and not out of consideration for my own comfort." At first St. Teresa did not think of anything but finding some quiet place where they could give themselves to contemplation more easily. But something happened. . .

"At about this time there came to my notice the harm and havoc that were being wrought in France by these Lutherans and the way in which their unhappy sect was increasing. This troubled me very much, and, as though I could do anything, or be of any help in the matter, I cried to God and begged Him to remedy this great evil. I felt that I would have laid down a thousand lives in order to save a single one of the many souls perishing there." This goaded her into making her religious family completely austere and poor. Numerous chapters of her *Way* treat of these characteristics.

We may ask ourselves what kind of apostolate St. Teresa wished to live. The Carmelite apostolate is based on a fervent inner life that makes the soul powerful over the Heart of God. This power comes from the total gift of self, made as perfect as possible by means of the evangelical counsels. Carmelites are entirely devoted to Our Lord, sparing nothing in order to give to Him. These expressions of completeness, of totality—which we find also in the works of St. John of the Cross—show how high St. Teresa's ideal is.

The first thing needed to move the Heart of God and help save souls is to become intimate with Him. This friendship makes one's prayer and penance powerful, and prayer and penance are the interior tools of the apostolate. "As my whole yearning was, and still is, that, as He has so many enemies and so few friends, these last should be trusty ones, I determined to do the little that was in me—namely, to follow the evangelical counsels as perfectly as I could, and to see that these few nuns who are here should do the same, confiding in the great goodness of God, Who never fails to help those who resolve to forsake everything for His sake. As they are all that I have ever painted them as being in my desires, I hoped that their virtues would more than counteract my defects, and I should thus be able to give the Lord some pleasure." Pleasing Our Lord one becomes dear to His Heart; then prayer will really have power. ". . . And all of us, by busying ourselves in prayer for the champions of the Church, and for the preachers and theologians who

defend her, should do everything we could to aid this Lord of mine Who is attacked with so much cruelty by those to whom He has shown so much good."

So the tools of the Carmelite apostolate—prayer and penance—get their power from the soul's love for God.

Saint Teresa had mentioned the immediate object of her apostolate in the words just quoted (i.e. for whom she wished to pray); in the third chapter she did so again but at greater length. She wished to obtain the highest graces for all who defend the Church. But these defenders exist for the souls who make up the Church; hence she said she wished to pray for the conversion of sinners, for the salvation of souls. "Oh my sisters in Christ! Help me to pray to Our Lord for this! This is why we live here together, why the Lord has brought you here; it must be your work, the object of your longings; your tears and prayer must beg for this."

Teresa's first intention, the most important, was the salvation of souls. Other intentions were not excluded, but there is an immense difference between worldly matters and the apostolic intention proper to Carmel. "Let us not pray for worldly things, my sisters," and she went into particulars. She allowed praying for any good intention and it may even be a duty towards benefactors to do so, but she made a sharp distinction between intentions of a temporal kind and this special intention. "It makes me laugh, and yet it makes me sad, when I hear of the things which people come here to beg us to pray to God for; we are to ask His Majesty to give them money and to provide them with incomes—I wish that some of these people would beg God for grace to trample all such things under-foot. These people mean well, and I do as they ask because of their piety in asking for it, although, for my part, I believe God never listens to such prayers from me . . . "

"Were it not necessary to consider human frailty, which finds satisfaction in every kind of help—and it is always a good thing if we can be of any help to people—I should like it to be understood that it is not for things like these that God should be importuned with such anxiety."

"The world is on fire. Men try to condemn Christ once more . . ."

St. Teresa lived the truth of the Mystical Body of Christ; she understood Our Lord's words to St. Paul on the road to Damascus: "Why dost thou persecute Me?" (Acts IX, 4). Like the

Apostle she felt with the Church: to persecute the Church is to persecute Jesus; to do good to the Church is to do good to Jesus, to extend His Mystical Body and make it glorious. "Oh, my Redeemer! How it wearies my heart to think of this! . . . It is certain, my Lord, that in these days withdrawal from the world means no sacrifice at all. Since worldly people have so little respect for Thee, what can we expect them to have for us? . . . we who, through the goodness of the Lord, are free from that pestilential infection, and so not, like those others, belong to the devil? They have won severe punishment . . . So to eternal fire they will have to go, though it breaks my heart to see so many souls travelling to perdition. I would that the evil were not so great and I did not see more being lost every day." The apostolate was urgent in St. Teresa's time, in the flood of Protestantism, but it is no less urgent now, in the flood of secularism and organized atheism. The Church's enemies are powerful and organized. But she has many fervent friends, too, and it is they who can acquire power over the Heart of God.

POVERTY

The mendicant Orders live in poverty in order to be free to serve souls anywhere. And the very fact that they receive their livelihood from the people obliges them to the apostolate. Hence there is a close connection between poverty and the apostolate, and, consequently, the second chapter of the *Way* (which St. Teresa devoted to the study of poverty) does not seem a digression injected between the two that present the apostolate.

She recalled the Gospel concept of poverty: showed how praiseworthy it is, and drew the consequences. The Gospel points the way to freeing oneself from everything: "Sell all that belongs to thee; give it to the poor, and so the treasure thou hast shall be in heaven; then come back and follow Me."[2] But there is more than that to holy poverty. Material goods give an assurance for the future; one cannot throw away one's security in life without substituting something better. If a person were not convinced that God would take care of him, he would act like a fool if he renounced all future security. So Our Lord began to speak of the birds and lilies (Matt. VI, 25-34) when He

[2] Cf. Matt. XIX, 21 — Mark X, 21 — Luke XVIII, 22.

taught us poverty. "See how the birds of the air never sow, or reap, or gather grain into barns: and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Have you not an excellence beyond theirs?" "And why should you be anxious over clothing? See how the lilies of the field grow. . ." St. Teresa believed and was sure that Our Lord would take care of her daughters if they were good nuns occupied with His interests; so she told them not to be anxious about people's gifts.

She insisted on liberty of spirit in matters of sustenance, and, first of all, on not being anxious about whether there will *be* any food or not. Little can be said after that! She asked a great deal: never to follow those little natural impulses that are so much a part of us.

* * *

St. Teresa had been carried away by enthusiasm in singing the praises of poverty; she admitted she had not realized it and added: "But as it has been said, let it remain." As long as she lived, she said, she would never cease repeating this, but it was well to have it written down so that her daughters would remember it after her death.

One advantage of poverty, she pointed out, is that it gives dominion over all the world. Among men distinction is measured by wealth. Certainly the recognition today given labor marks human progress: people ought to be respected more for their labor than for their possessions. But our society still suffers from this evil, and honor goes to money; and so arises the anxiety to get it in order to make one's way in the world. But what we need is to let go of earthly things; St. Teresa had good reason to praise poverty.

Another advantage she saw in this virtue was that it was a safeguard for the spiritual life, a protection from everything that could impede flight towards God. So often the religious Orders have lost their fervor by weakening the practice of poverty.

A final advantage, she said, was that the monastery's poverty was an opportunity to practice that aspostolate she spoke of in the first chapter. The nuns should help others by means of prayer and they would receive aid without seeking it. God would move hearts to send them the necessities of life. They should be grateful to Him, and repay their benefactors by their apostolate of prayer and meritorious work. It is a custom in Teresian monasteries to pray together for the benefactors each evening at the end of supper, after the alms have been read out.

St. Teresa exhorted the nuns earnestly to obtain their benefactors' spiritual welfare by their prayers. In so doing, they would also give God the glory flowing from these souls' well-being.

FOR THE PRIESTHOOD

The third chapter of the *Way of Perfection* returns to Carmel's chief purpose: to help the Church's apostolate by prayer for graces needed. It begins by looking at the best strategy for the apostolate and at the priesthood's place in it. Teresa was thinking of her own tormented century when she wrote, but the best plan for spiritual conquest is still the same today, and everyone is convinced that to win the world back to Christianity we need to create a select group. This must be done especially among the official apostles, for though others collaborate in apostolic work, they are always inspired by its official promoters. Today, the laity's collaboration with the hierarchy's apostolate is insisted upon more than in St. Teresa's time, for in those days no environment was closed to the priest. Today the sign "Entrance Forbidden" on factory doors and elsewhere keeps priests out of the places where youth is facing serious dangers. Into these places the official minister of Jesus Christ cannot penetrate, and here the layman's apostolic must develop. Hence, all that St. Teresa desired to do for priests applies also to those who work in union with the hierarchy.

From the Middle Ages on, the common people have been going farther and farther from Christ; today huge masses are ignorant to the Faith. A reconquest is needed, and that will require intelligence and virtue. Our glance, with the Saint, turns mainly towards priests. She did well in specifying preachers and theologians. Not only those who distribute doctrine to the faithful, but also (and in the first place) those who by arduous study—not possible for preachers—fathom its depths, giving preachers by their books the bread of doctrine they must distribute.

And this is all the more necessary as we are exposed to error by human limitations; so much effort is required to get at the truth. There have always been heresies in Holy Church and there are some now: tendencies from which we like to think ourselves freed are still alive. After Pius X's effective work against Modernism we though it dead, but it is raising its head again and danger is felt here and there. The theologian has

the high mission of trying to preserve the Church's heritage intact and displaying it in all its vigor and beauty. He applies doctrine to the actual conditions of life for the guidance of all souls: from those just beginning to live the moral life to those reaching the heights of sanctity.

The Saint showed keen intuition in fixing attention first on theologians and then on preachers. If Christian doctrine were well preached it would draw the crowds, but ignorance makes people dislike the Church. So many poor workmen allow themselves to be taken in by socialism and communism because they are unaware of the beauty of Christ's teachings. In 1936 in France, when the Communists offered to collaborate with the Catholics, there was some reciprocal contact, and in a meeting of two Communists with a Dominican Father, the priest gave the encyclicals "Rerum novarum" and "Quadragesimo anno" to the Communists. The two came back in a few days after reading them, with the comment, "You are idiots to have such beautiful social doctrines and not see that they are lived out." These doctrines are too little known even by Catholics. They arouse real enthusiasm among workmen when presented to them in their own language, with examples from their own lives. But that means there must be men to study them and others to present them to the people. This is the work of theologians and preachers. And it is plain that the more educated laity can collaborate in making these teachings known.

We said there is always danger of error; to show it as error requires learned men. There is need to pray that these men may destroy it in time.

* * *

The priesthood's prominent role in winning people back to Christ justifies St. Teresa's desire to establish this specially prepared group. She points out to the Carmelite nuns two things to seek in their prayers for priests: that they *be* holy, and that they *remain* holy amid the dangers of the apostolate.

First of all priests must be holy, for one holy man can do more than many who are not holy. Today there is a thirst for holiness among priests as well as an effective education for it. Through the priest's holiness, and his consequent generosity, Jesus Christ distributes the means of holiness to others. During His mortal life, Jesus taught, trained His disciples, and instituted the sacraments. The priest does the same: he teaches the Church's doctrine; he rules and trains his parish, his diocese,

or the whole Church (the Pope), and by spiritual direction he also trains souls. He administers the sacraments, from baptism to the Eucharist. All this is related to his holiness. The preaching of a holy priest will move hearts; an enlightened director will make souls recognize what God wills; a generous priest will know how to bear fatigue in administering the sacraments.

People are won when Christian doctrine is presented as attractively and clearly as it deserves. Thus, St. Teresa says, we must pray that priests be holy.

And we must also ask God that they remain so, for in their ministry they must continually be in contact with the world. They need a matured spirit of mortification not to surrender to the satisfactions their life may offer, satisfactions of heart, of mind and of honor; if they should, they would no longer be channels of supernatural life but would remain God's instruments only in a material sense. In particular, priests need to obey, for sure guidance comes from Rome, and when one no longer wishes to hear her venerable voice there is danger of going astray.

St. Teresa taught prayer by her own example, and she gave good example by praying as a member of the Mystical Body together with her sisters and with Jesus, the Head. It is splendid to see the doctrine of the Mystical Body lived thus at a time when it was not much spoken of. It was always a vital part of the Church's teaching, and St. Teresa loved the Church so much that her devotion was aroused by whatever was essential in its doctrine.

And here a thought, expressed repeatedly in the course of this chapter, reappeared: we must become fit to obtain from God what we pray for. *Fit,* that is pleasing to God and able to mediate with the Heart of God. And the only way a creature can please God is to do His will. Teresa had just proposed a life of complete self-denial; here was the root of the effectiveness of Carmel's prayer. She did not make positive statements, but spoke as if simply manifesting a desire. But her intuition made her desire what Pope Pius XI confirmed in the Bull "Umbratilem" of 1924, where we read the following: "Much more is contributed to the growth and development of the Church by contemplative groups than by those who perform the actual labors, for it is they who call down from heaven the vivifying graces to irrigate the plowed fields of the other apostolic workers."[3] The Holy Father clearly states here that the

[3] A. A. S. 16 (1924), 385.

external apostolate would be less fruitful if these souls did not exist. They do much more, he says unhesitatingly, than those who dedicate themselves to apostolic activity.

This asserts the need for purely contemplative Orders in the Church, even from a simply apostolic point of view, and confirms St. Teresa's intuition. She spoke with her daughters in mind, but *the same is true of everyone who gives himself entirely,* so that God regards him with pleasure.

She ended the chapter with a general glance at Carmelite life, in which everything should have this apostolic aim: "If your prayers and desires and disciplines and fasts are not performed for the intentions of which I have spoken, reflect and believe that you are not carrying out the work or fulfilling the object for which God placed you here." At this high target St. Teresa would have her followers aim; she wished them to have vast desires. And what desire is greater than the all-absorbing one for the salvation of souls, the very purpose Our Lord Jesus Christ had in the Redemption, to give and to increase in all men the life of the most holy Trinity?

Part II

The Atmosphere of Contemplation

I

MUTUAL LOVE

In this second part of the Way of Perfection—from Chapter IV to Chapter XVI—St. Teresa describes the virtues which detach the soul from creatures and render it interiorly free to receive the gift of contemplation and to be united to God.

To surround the soul with the atmosphere favorable to contemplation she began by establishing a principle: if we wish to enter into intimate friendship with God in order to obtain graces for the Church, we must declare our love to Him and prove it by responding to its demands.

Then, if it is true that mortification draws its strength from prayer, the opposite is also true, namely that prayer grows strong through mortification for it finds in mortification the support it needs to become contemplation. The Saint, therefore, established the principle that prayer cannot be accompanied by self-indulgence. Of these two means employed by the contemplative life like two wings to rise to God, the more important is prayer; but, experience proves that mortification defends prayer, and in this respect I am of the opinion that mortification is the more important.

A person who does not cultivate mortification will not be a man of prayer; if a person, or a community, or a congregation loses the spirit of mortification, it loses the foundation of prayer. How necessary it is, then, to foster the habit of denying our whims for natural satisfaction and comfort. Without insistence on the practice of mortification our natural appetite for satisfaction awakens and makes its demands.

Mortification in material matters has to be emphasized today when everywhere the spiritual is neglected. If we do not want the body to limit the soul, we must master it and control it through mortification. The spiritual life is an impossibility if the body is not mortified. Prayer certainly cannot be accompanied by self-indulgence. St. Teresa insisted that an explanation of prayer demands consideration of mortification. She intended to write about prayer, but added: "I shall speak of

certain things which those who attempt to walk along the way of prayer must of necessity practise. So necessary are these that, even though not greatly given to contemplation, people who have them can advance a long way in the Lord's service, while, unless they have them, they cannot possibly be great contemplatives." Contemplation is a gift of God which He gives when He wills, as He wills and to whom He wills, and one may have to wait long before receiving it, but if, meanwhile, we do what is indicated in this chapter we may be sure that we shall advance greatly in perfection. If we are faithful, Our Lord will not fail us, but it is we ourselves who must prepare in our souls the moral atmosphere in which this grace can flourish.

* * *

St. Teresa used three points to develop the second part of her book: fraternal charity, detachment from all created things, and true humility. This third point is really a section in the discussion of detachment, for the Saint passes quickly from detachment to humility, since the latter is also a form of detachment. But the first matter, fraternal charity, is developed separately.

In this plan St. Teresa has taught in practical language what St. John of the Cross, her spiritual son and master, developed doctrinally in the first book of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (ch. XIII): namely, that one does not arrive at the "all" except by passing through the "nothing." A true theologian he not only explained it but proved it, basing himself on the nature of union: "In the state of divine union a man's will is so completely transformed in God's will that it excludes anything contrary to God's will, and in all and through all is motivated by the will of God."[1] To be united to God, then, one must have renounced self-love, since it is impossible to be united with God by love while self-love lurks in the soul. As long as there is the least attachment, transformation is not possible, for one will be motivated, not by divine love, but by self-love. The clear, unavoidable conclusion follows that every attachment must be renounced. A person of prayer who wishes to live not only for God, but by God, moved truly in everything by the Holy Spirit, must cast out everything else, so he is moved only by the Holy Spirit. St. Teresa taught that God will not give Him-

[1] St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel,* I, XI, 2. Cf. also *Spiritual Canticle,* XXXVII.

self completely unless the soul gives itself completely to Him. She does not prove her statement, but she is obviously convinced and wishes her followers to learn that one does not arrive at that state in which God communicates Himself to the soul except by means of a life of absolute generosity in the atmosphere of complete detachment.

This second part of the *Way* actually takes us to the heart of the contemplative life. One does not attain depth in prayer unless he surrounds himself with mortification and detachment. This is the spiritual climate we must create in our soul if we wish our prayer to become contemplation.

St. John of the Cross proved the absolute necessity of detachment by reasoning—setting up the principle and proving it. But principles are abstract. St. Teresa viewed this teaching intuitively and went at once to its actual practice. She is both profound and psychologically sound; she not only stressed weak points but also indicated remedies, that is, how souls can be healed and made strong.

PURIFICATION OF LOVE

"There are only three things which I will explain . . . One of these is love for each other." In this matter St. Teresa first discussed the purification of love and then, in chapter VII, explained the exercise of purified love.

First let us glance at the psychology of love in human nature. Man has a single nature composed of soul and body, of spirit and matter. God made us thus and we cannot change anything; we must sanctify ourselves as we are; our love is human love. We have a double power of love: we can love with the will and with the feelings; and we habitually do both, for we are one sole nature, one sole person. The will and the heart influence one another; these two powers of loving are often united and we love with both the will and the feelings.

Both loves are guided by knowledge: sensible love by the senses, spiritual love by the intellect. Knowledge presents to us the object to love. Feeling responds to sensible knowledge, the will's inclination to intellectual knowledge. We love in a sensible way when we are drawn by external gifts, by a pleasing manner: a person with whom we get along well makes a sensible affection arise in our heart. If we think about this person we nourish our sensible affection for him. And one can seek pleasure in the presence or the remembrance of the person loved;

so this would be a less noble love, seeking satisfaction for oneself. The will's love, on the other hand, is nourished by the qualities which our intellect sees in others. Even in persons who make no appeal to our senses, our intellect can find reasons for love, and when it does, the will inclines to love.

Here lies the difference between sensible love and love of the will: the former can aim at one's own satisfaction, but the will's love—if the intention is kept pure—always thinks of the good of the other, even if it means forgetting oneself, renouncing one's own interests. This is noble love; the other could be much inferior.

Love of charity, or supernatural love, is spiritual, not sensible. God, to enable us enter into His intimacy, has elevated our faculties with their acts to a supernatural order. The love He came to develop in us is spiritual, nourished by the intellect which considers what is lovable in persons—but the intellect guided by faith, not merely the natural intellect.

We have seen that sensible love grows by seeing and communicating with the loved one; it can become self-centered and be nourished by the presence of a sensible good. Spiritual love too is moved by a good, but a good which the intellect, not the bodily eye, sees. This is love of charity guided by faith.

But that is not all: because man is a unit, a single person, there is mutual influence between the two forms of love. I feel within me these two urges to love and I can love the same person with the will's love and with the affections. Often feeling is so strong that it tries to draw the will along with it. Though loving a person for his spiritual gifts, I may be captivated by his external qualities. I still love him spiritually, but my heart is no longer free. Now there is a passion of love; this is not a good thing. The will is superior to the feelings, and should rule in us. If sensible love should come to dominate and draw the will after it, there would be a lack of balance that would do much harm.

But not only does feeling influence the will; the will's love also influences feeling: a blessed fact which allows God's grace to seize and elevate our whole being in prayer. Feeling, like intellect and will, is only one function of human psychic life, which makes us delight in the joys and suffer from the sorrows we meet on the way to union with God. If I love God with an active love of the will, feeling is easily awakened in me because of the harmony between the psychic functions.

The same thing that happens with love for God may happen towards creatures: there is nothing wrong nor imperfect in this as long as feeling remains under control of the intellect and the will. So if I notice a sensible inclination towards a person whom I love spiritually, I will watch over my heart and not allow it to go beyond what God wills, loving in dependence on God and respecting the person according to the position in which God has placed him.

When there is question of loving God, to love Him with the feelings can help one love Him more with the will. But there is always danger of a little attachment to self, since such sentiments bring consolation and satisfy nature; thus God casts the soul into aridity to purify it.

* * *

After this review of the psychology of love we can understand when St. Teresa says: "It may seem that for us to have too much love for each other cannot be wrong, but I do not think anyone who had not been an eye-witness of it would believe how much evil and how many imperfections can result from this . . . Little by little they deprive the will of the strength which it needs if it is to employ itself wholly in the love of God," because affection for creatures, when strong, becomes a passion and steals from the will the liberty of spirit necessary to love God with all one's power. Our affections need to be well disciplined. Our first parents, like us, had a double power of love, but they had also a special divine gift which harmonized spiritual and sensitive love in them. We cannot return to this perfect balance except by a firm discipline such as the one Teresa wished to indicate to her followers. To make us understand our need of it she lingered briefly upon a deviation from love, the particular friendship, indicated its inconveniences, insisted on the necessity of avoiding it, and gave remedies.

"This is even more applicable to women than to men." Woman is more affectionate and therefore more prone to be ruled by sentiment and drawn by external attractiveness. But if her affection is well directed, it becomes a force to aid her in loving God. It spurs the will, and we see how strong love of God can be in a woman.

"If our will becomes inclined more to one person than to another (this cannot be helped, because it is natural—it often leads us to love the person who has the most faults if she is the most richly endowed by nature) we must exercise a firm re-

straint on ourselves and not allow ourselves to be conquered by our affection. Let us love the virtues and inward goodness, and let us always apply ourselves and take care to avoid attaching importance to externals."

PERFECT LOVE

Teresa resumed consideration of the theme of perfect love in chapter VI. "Let us now return to the love which it is good for us to feel. This I have described as purely spiritual." How will she explain it to us? Were she a theologian, she would define it, but since she was not, she described it. She lacked theological training, but she had theological intuition; and if we glance at theology's definition we shall find all the characteristics she describes.

Theologians define perfect spiritual love as a love which seeks in God alone its entire foundation for its goodness. For this reason spiritual goods are sought for the soul. The characteristics of this love are:

1) to seek its motive in God alone: love always has its motives; the soul who loves purely loves with God as motive;

2) not to seek a return in any way: it is a love of pure good will to give and is not concerned about receiving;

3) to desire spiritual goods for its beloved; if sometimes it desires material goods for him, it is in view of spiritual ones. And all supernatural goods are contained in the simple desire that he be holy.

These are the characteristics of perfect love according to the doctrine of St. Thomas, and they correspond to those given by St. Teresa. The love of charity is that borne each other by those who know how far God surpasses all creatures and the place He deserves in our hearts, and who therefore cannot love except for His sake. They love because those they love belong to God. This is the sentiment of those who have given themselves completely to God. And it is experience of how different from creatures God is, that makes one give himself to God, and never love any more except for His sake.

How well the Saint spoke of this: ". . . when God has brought someone to a clear knowledge of the world, and of its nature, . . . and of what it is to love the Creator and what to love the creature (this must be discovered by experience, for it is a very different matter from merely thinking about it and believing it)"—notice the reference to contemplative knowledge—". . .

then one loves very differently from those of us who have not advanced thus far" (ch. VI). Having given one's heart to God, one cannot give it to others, and will not occupy himself with creatures except because God wills it. God wills us to love our neighbors, but only for their relation to Himself: they are His children. Therefore we shall not love them for their natural gifts, for the pleasure of associating with them, but because "their God is our God."[2] And we shall love them with a love which knows by experience how different God is from everything created.

This is just what the world does not understand, not having experience of the transcendence of God. People today speak as if God should be at our service; but it is we who should be at the service of God: we are creatures dependent on Him. If today certain "mystiques" are arising which exalt the human personality, it is because awareness of God's transcendence is lacking. Man becomes the center of such false spirituality and there is even a desire to make prayer serve him by putting at his disposal a force he lacks. But this is not serving God: it is loving oneself, subordinating God to man.

St. Teresa understood well that, if we wish to love in a spiritual manner, God must occupy the central place in our life. Supernatural love is pure benevolence; sensible love desires its own satisfaction, and hence is called by theologians "love of concupiscence."

"You will answer me that such persons cannot love or repay the affection shown to them by others. Certainly they care little about having this affection;" persons who love spiritually do not really seek the satisfactions of the heart—those who do need a return of love. And what is the love of a creature compared to the love of God—eternal friendship? Whoever loves spiritually desires only help for the spiritual life and therefore seeks the good will of persons who can help him love God better; this is acting on a supernatural plane and is not seeking self-satisfaction, but looking to our end which is God.

"When we desire anyone's affection, we always seek it because of some interest. . .": this is not supernatural love. It may seem that spiritual persons "will love none and delight in none save God. Actually, they will love others much more than they ever did, with a more genuine love, with greater passion

[2] Cf. St. Augustine, *The City of God,* XII.

and with a love which brings more profit; that, in a word, is what love really is. And such souls are always much fonder of giving than of receiving, even in their relations with the Creator Himself" because this love goes directly to God, desiring that our whole being should be consumed for His glory.

"Do you ask, again, by what they are attracted if they do not love things they see? They do love what they see and they are greatly attracted by what they hear; but the things which they see are everlasting. . ." (ch. VI). They love what they see, but with the eyes of faith they see souls redeemed by Jesus Christ, with all the supernatural gifts for which they deserve love. And not living on the natural plane any longer, it would be out of place for them to desire anything which has only natural value; their desire is that others become perfectly pleasing to God.

In the last sentence of this chapter VI the Saint proposes Jesus as model of fraternal love; Jesus gave Himself for souls, and we, loving our neighbor, must be ready to sacrifice ourselves for him, and to show him all the delicacies of love we would show Jesus.

EXERCISE OF PURIFIED LOVE

St. Teresa, treating of the exercise of pure spiritual love, placed it in opposition to natural love, which, though lawful, is imperfect and leads to weaknesses. Natural love is concerned with material goods and makes us anxious when the person we love has some misfortune; we are not at peace. Supernatural love is concerned only with spiritual goods: growth in grace and sanctity. Now we know it is not possible to become saints without trials; so we should know how to value the trials of those we love, and, seeing them in the crucible of suffering, remember that God wishes to purify and sanctify them.

Still, as there is an interplay between the two forms of love, supernatural love cannot help feeling sympathy for its friends' sufferings. Even though one loves supernaturally and esteems suffering, one may also feel a first movement of resentment in these cases, but it will be controlled by the will, very different from a disordered and tyrannical affection. When we see someone who knows how to draw profit from his sufferings we will rejoice, knowing the value of this great means of sanctity. In the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* Pius XII exhorted the faithful during the terrible war years to draw profit from suffering: ". . . We know that if all the painful calamities of this turbulent period,

that cruelly torture countless men, are accepted as from God's hands with calm and submissive spirit, they naturally lift souls above the passing things of earth to the eternal ones of heaven, and stimulate a certain unsuspected thirst and keen desire for spiritual things. Thus, with the added grace of the Divine Spirit, men are moved and, one might say, compelled to be more thoughtful in seeking the Kingdom of God." When we see someone suffering we ought to pray that he put himself completely in God's hands, with the patience and courage needed to draw profit from trial.

Supernatural love, even when accompanied by a certain tenderness, does not look to anything but helping everyone to fulfill his duty well. One who loves both supernaturally and affectionately cannot allow his heart to be taken captive nor do to others what is not right, just to please them; that would be weakness. Our love must not stoop to evil; it must sympathize with others and desire them to be perfect, without claiming a return of love.

II

DETACHMENT

St. Teresa stressed the importance of her second proposal in a rather striking manner: "Let us now come to the detachment which we must practise, for if this is carried out perfectly it includes everything else" (ch. VIII).[1]

Of course, this does not mean that the practice of perfection is only an exercise of detachment. Detachment is a means, not an end; but it is a means which affects the whole spiritual life and, if practiced perfectly, leads one quickly to the goal. The Saint explains to us how this comes about: first, complete detachment does not constitute the exclusive means to sanctity, but, second, when a person is completely generous, God is generous to him and wills to bring him to divine union. Teresa merely states what St. John of the Cross was later to write: "If a person is seeking God, his Beloved is seeking him much more."[2]

God seeks man by giving him more grace and the infused virtues which will make him beautiful, strong, and pleasing to Him. The virtues are like a cuirass which defends and strengthens, so that—when the gifts of the Holy Spirit make these virtues act more perfectly—a person grows in heroism and becomes capable of doing even the most difficult things for God. "If we care nothing for any created things, but embrace the Creator alone, His Majesty will infuse the virtues into us in such a way that, provided we labor to the best of our abilities day by day, we shall not have to wage war much longer, for the Lord will take our defence in hand against the devils and against the whole world."

With such an assurance we can esteem the grace of complete detachment more sincerely: "of giving ourselves wholly to the All and keeping nothing for ourselves."

SELF-DENIAL

Teresa employed the metaphor of a man who goes to bed quite peacefully, after bolting all his doors, although thieves are already in the house. "And you know there is no worse thief

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[1] Cf. the whole chapter.

[2] St. John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love,* III, 28.

than one who lives in the house." Our greatest enemy is self, our own person. Not that it is wrong to be a person. Mere "person" is taken in a pejorative sense, which is, the base personal tendencies we must combat, inclinations St. Teresa called "self-will". "Unless we take great care and each of us looks well to it that she renounces her self-will, which is the most important business of all, there will be many things to deprive us of the holy freedom of spirit which our souls seek in order to soar to their Maker unburdened by the leaden weight of the earth" (ch. X). Our souls are injured by the perverse qualities of our will. "The leaden weight of the earth" symbolizes the useless—sometimes even injurious—preoccupations which a person brings upon himself if he holds to his own will (when he wants everything to go as *he* desires rather than as God wills.) We need to remind ourselves that we seek a state of perfection wherein we lose our will in the will of God. As long as we cling to our will we shall be burdened by "the leaden weight of the earth", that is, preoccupations, and we shall lack freedom of spirit.

We must remember that *things* are not always bad: we can wish for good things, but in a selfish way. For instance, if we see a person doing something good, but not according to *our* way, we would almost like to force him to do it as *we* wish: yet there is no law that everything must go as we see it.

We must look higher, beyond our human ideas, even the best. God has His purposes, although most of the time His ways are mysterious to us. Despite our darkness and defects He develops good in the souls of those who really want to love Him. The cause of our joy should be that God's plans are accomplished, not ours, even though ours are good. A person who conforms to the will of God is serene, seeing beyond secondary causes the first cause. We can have our desires, but our first desire should be to accept the divine will; so we should not be disturbed when we see our wishes unfulfilled.

This is what the Saint understands by self-will: the deliberate desire that things go according to personal taste. It can exist even in regard to virtues: for example, we plan to acquire humility and wish to do it in a month. Now, it is certain that God also wishes us to become humble, but He may permit us to exercise ourselves in this virtue without seeing the results. He wishes us to apply ourselves; we may be sure that we shall succeed, though perhaps not according to our plans.

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As to means for detaching oneself, Teresa indicated those she used herself.

The first is to "keep constantly in our thoughts the vanity of all things and the rapidity with which they pass away" (ch. X). The world, immersed in temporalities, has lost its awareness of the transitoriness of created things. Many live as if they were going to live forever in this world. Perhaps we might not go this far, but we do tend to lose ourselves in details and attach far too much importance to details. Once we convince ourselves that everything passes, and that what we desire may have little bearing on eternal life, we shall acquire true serenity.

The second means the Saint indicated is to turn to God when we find ourselves paying too much attention to something which interests us. Actually, the frustration we experience when we find that things do not succeed as we wish indicates our attachment to them. "With regard to small things, we must be very careful, as soon as we begin to grow fond of them, to withdraw our thoughts from them and turn them to God. His Majesty will help us to do this" (ibid.).

Regarding things which depend on circumstances not in our power we are encouraged by Teresa to have an attitude of abandonment: "My God, think of us; I wish to think of You!" This is practically what St. Teresa says to us. We want ourselves and everything we have to be His. When we find ourselves too preoccupied with something, we should repeat that we wish His (not our) plan to be carried out; He will help us to reach union with Him and to reach it as quickly as possible.

And, to facilitate self-denial, the Saint suggested a third means: humility. She gave only a few hints on it at this point; in another place she treated it more at length.[3]

"When you have obtained (these two virtues, humility and mortification), you will also obtain the manna; all things will taste well to you; and however much the world may dislike their savor, to you they will be sweet" (ch. X). This happens to one who has surrendered to the will of God. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus is a perfect example; by following the teaching of St. John of the Cross[4] she turned all her actions, even the most indifferent, into acts of love.

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[3] We give the explanation of it with the comprehensive treatment of humility.

[4] St. John of the Cross, *Canticle*, XXVIII, 8.

In general, St. Teresa's remarks on detachment stress its necessity and the means for obtaining it; she extended an invitation to all to be generous with God in the practice of continual self-denial.

INTERIOR MORTIFICATION

Teresa then proceeded to a discussion of interior mortification which she called renouncement of the will, taking the word *will* in a rather broad sense to extend from one's natural inclinations to the occupations, persons and objects in which he could find satisfaction.[5]

The Saint was aware that efforts at mortifying (or controlling) our spontaneous tendencies constitute a real "war again self". But she felt sure of God's help: "But once we begin to work, God, too, works in our souls and bestows such favors on them that the most we can do in this life seems to us very little" (ch. XII). It is another way of saying what we have already quoted from St. John of the Cross: "If a person is seeking God, his Beloved is seeking him much more." Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus often repeated this: "He brought me the strength and courage I needed. He armed me so well . . . that I never looked back; I was like a soldier, winning one vantage-point after another, like a 'great runner who sees the track before him' . . . if I would only correspond faithfully with each grace that was given me, a multitude of others would follow."[6] The quest of perfection indicates war against self, and that war is a costly one; yet a conviction that detachment is an essential means for reaching the fullness of divine life carries great power of motivation with it.

To attain complete generosity in detachment from self, Teresa offered several counsels. Her keen psychological intuition prompted her to say first that it is attained gradually: ". . . this is acquired by a gradual progress and by never indulging our own will and desire, even in small things, until we have succeeded in subduing the body to the spirit" (ch. XII); and she speaks not only of our will, but also of our desire, i.e., our natural

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[5] The Saint treated of them extensively, devoting four chapters (XII-XV) to them, mentioning exercises of humility and of humiliation and teaching several in particular.

[6] St. Thérèse, *Autobiography*, V, 167.

inclinations. She continued to insist on this in the following paragraphs. "I repeat that this consists mainly or entirely in our ceasing to care about ourselves and our own pleasures"; i.e., not being anxious about them. Let us "learn to subdue our wills in everything; for if, as I have said, you are very careful, you will find yourselves gradually reaching the summit of the mountain without knowing how."

St. John of the Cross taught the same doctrine.[7] It frightens souls at first when they hear that they must be inclined "not to the easiest, but to the most difficult; . . . not to the consoling, but to the unconsoling . . . not to wanting something but to wanting nothing." He does not say simply that we must always *do* it; his teaching is still deeper: to be always *inclined* to do it, whenever possible. This is Teresa's doctrine: keep generosity alive and dynamic.

In concluding the subject of interior mortification, St. Teresa anticipated an objection: "But how harsh it sounds to say that we must take pleasure in nothing!" (ch. XII). She had spoken of total detachment, practically a martyrdom. In answer she insisted that detachment is not an end in itself but a means ordained to our sanctification for the glory of God.

[7] *Ascent*, I, XIII, 5-6.

III

HUMILITY

Humility is the virtue which makes us stay *in our place* as creatures completely dependent upon God and anxious to do His will in everything. "This virtue and that of detachment from self, I think, always go together. They are two sisters, who are inseparable . . . you must embrace them, and love them" (ch. X). Teresa sought to win our love for these virtues, because we should love our littleness and desire to become like children. The child, conscious of its powerlessness, does not shrink within itself, but runs to its mother's arms; we should throw ourselves into God's arms and find the remedy for our weakness in His strength. Humility and trust are two aspects of the same virtue: without trust humility would not be Christian, nor would it even be a virtue.

"These virtues (humility and mortification) have the property of hiding themselves from one who possesses them, in such a way that he never sees them nor can believe that he has any of them, even if he be told so. But he esteems them so much that he is for ever trying to obtain them, and thus he perfects them in himself more and more" (ibid.). Those who sincerely seek humility can never feel that they possess it, because they are more conscious of their lack of it. Humility as an infused virtue cannot rule the soul completely until God puts it there; He does this by employing verious types of humiliations. Humiliation is a hard and bitter bread, it is true, but very nourishing. Yet each humiliation accepted with love leads to greater love.

AVOIDING PRECEDENCE

Saint Teresa described several practices of humility by way of advice toward attaining purity of soul, and the first of these is the struggle we must enter into against the desire to be preferred to others. She gave several examples of these desires, but the struggle we must engage in is much wider than the few cases she mentioned.

"Be very careful about your interior thoughts, especially if they have to do with precedence" (Ch. XII), and she described

a few of these. But she wished her followers to go further than repressing proud words: she urged them to combat the very thoughts which dictated them. The point in general is: we must avoid preferring ourselves to others.

Why are we prone to this defect? Because we are convinced that we are worth more, not in regard to everything, but in some specialized area. After finding that we have more capacity, we logically begin to wish others to agree; and we display our talent. Jesus did the contrary: He, the splendor of eternal light, hid Himself, let Himself be directed, above all in His infancy and at Nazareth; and in the years of the public life, He adapted Himself, infinitely superior as He was, to His apostles' imperfect way of acting.

The Saint next indicated the importance of vigilance in this matter for the contemplative life; where questions of honor reign "they will never make great progress or come to enjoy the real fruit of prayer" (Ch. XII). For St. Teresa the fruit of prayer was intimate union with God and both she and St. John of the Cross insist that this becomes a reality only after the soul practices absolute detachment. Thus, failure to mortify this inclination toward *the first place* constitutes a serious obstacle to intimacy with God. Realist that she was, Teresa admitted that sometimes God "grants consolation to persons less completely detached than that" (ibid.), but then He makes an exception in order to help the soul and He will not continue to favor it if it fails to correspond. Normally, therefore, only a person completely detached will reach contemplative union with God.

In Chapter III of the *Fifth Mansions* of the *Interior Castle* the Saint wrote about the two forms of union which the soul can reach: union with the will of God and mystical union. Teresa held the former in higher esteem, since mystical union, after all, presupposes the other.

St. John of the Cross affirmed the same: "The third caution, directly against the devil, is that you ever seek with all your heart to humble yourself in word and in deed, rejoicing in the good of others as if it were your own, desiring that they be given precedence over you in all things; and this you should do wholeheartedly. You will thereby overcome evil with good, banish the devil, and possess a happy heart. Try to practice this more with those who least attract you. Realize that if you do not train yourself in this way, you will not attain real charity

nor make any progress in it. Prefer to be taught by all rather than desire to teach even the least of all."[1]

* * *

Should detachment be lacking, even long years of "meditation" cannot lead to union with God. By "meditation" she here meant, not the main part of prayer—the intimate conversation with God placing our will at His disposal—but the exercise of the reason. It is very possible for a person to practice meditation in this way for many years without its leading him to union with God; "imperfect prayer" she said, would bear greater fruit.

Mortification of every desire of precedence is an outstanding exercise of humility. St. Teresa insisted on the close relationship between humility and the divine favors in many places in her works.[2] Every time she spoke of the dispositions for contemplation she spoke of humility: "humility, and again humility." This actually is Christ's teaching, as shall soon become apparent.

St. John of the Cross in the second book of the *Ascent* (ch. VII), said that when one can sincerely consider himself as nothing, he will have reached the state of union: "When he is brought to nothing, the highest degree of humility, the spiritual union between his soul and God will be effected."

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus repeated the same doctrine when she spoke of the spiritual childhood which attracts Merciful Love. It is the teaching of the Gospel: "He has looked graciously upon the lowliness of His handmaid . . . He has mercy upon those who fear Him." Jesus taught no doctrine more plainly than this: "He that humbles himself *shall be exalted.*"

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[1] In the *Precautions* St. John of the Cross traced the foundation of the education of the contemplative; in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* he directed his conversation with God; and in the *Spiritual Canticle* he described the whole spiritual road of the soul who seeks the goal of divine union. All three of these works were written for the Carmelite nuns of Beas and Granada.

We might ask why St. John always makes the preparation for divine intimacy consist in detachment, while St. Teresa stresses virtue. Actually virtue does detach the soul. The nine precautions of St. John point out a whole program of detachment — one which can be put into practice by exercise of the virtues.

[2] Cf. especially Chapter II of the IV *Mansions* in the *Interior Castle.*

Note that the form of the first verb is active, that of the second passive. God wishes man to realize that he cannot rely upon himself, so that he may lean completely upon Him; then he shall be carried by Him to the heights of union with God.

* * *

After Teresa has shown the importance of combatting sentiments of precedence, she counseled generosity and energy in the fight. "If she is really humble, I do not think the devil will care to tempt her to take even the slightest interest in matters of precedence . . . lest he should get his head broken!" (ibid.).

The devil is too astute to tempt a truly humble person, for the humble man uses the temptation to humble himself the more. "If a humble man is tempted in this way . . . he cannot fail to grow stronger in this virtue and gain profit." When St. Teresa Margaret was passing through the "night of the spirit", God made her see how little she corresponded with grace; yet (to us) she was so faithful! God does not lie: the light of contemplation shows clearly that God's invitations are far beyond our response to them.

St. Teresa recommended careful study of the example of humility given by the Incarnate Word, more than looking at our own misery—God's mercy, more than our defects. This is the way to true interior humility and to the realization that our place, in all truth, is the last. . .

Along with interior humiliation, exterior humiliations are also encouraged as a means of conquering the temptation to preference and to turn it to our neighbor's profit. "Study . . . to bend your will to perform tasks you dislike. The Lord will show you ways of doing so and this will soon rid you of the temptation" (ch. XII).

Effort is necessary, for "there is no poison in the world which is so fatal to perfection" (ibid.) as desiring honors. St. Teresa ended with some reflections to emphasize what she said: "You will say that these are little things which have to do with human nature and are not worth troubling about." Yes, certainly these are natural things, only too natural—completely opposed to the supernatural—and therefore worth greatly troubling about. "They spread like foam on water."

GIVING UP OUR RIGHTS

With chapter thirteen Teresa began to discuss the second exercise of humility which is the renunciation of our "little"

rights. She gave the reasons for it, two models, and then other considerations to show how necessary it is.

"I often tell you, sisters, and now I want it to be set down in writing, not to forget that we in this house, and for that matter anyone who would be perfect, must flee a thousand miles from such phrases as: 'I had right on my side;' 'They had no right to do this to me;' 'The person who treated me like this was not right.' " This was not a mere passing thought, or whim of the Saint, but a mature reflection she wished to leave in writing. It is closely bound to the first practice (of not seeking preference) and with the one which will follow (of not excusing oneself).

St. Teresa felt that it was a serious imperfection to make such remarks. But if they are not spoken, much less should they be thought. A man's first reaction may be to feel hurt, but Teresa would have him not dwell on it for to her it is "a right" —not always false in itself, but wrong in the sense that if he acts upon it he shall cease giving God everything.

This chapter thirteen is a chain of arguments aimed at convincing the reader of the importance of this form of humility. "I do not know why anyone is in a convent who is willing to bear only the crosses they have a perfect right to give her." How can anyone aspire to perfection if he accepts only merited crosses, while he rejects those which seem a little unjust?

But there is another motive: in no social group can all persons be treated with perfect justice. Everyone usually has to sacrifice some fraction of his rights. Human life is a whole network of mutual rights and, because of man's limitations, not all of them are always going to be respected. If man had the intuitive intelligence of the angels, which sees everything in one glance, he could recognize all the needs and rights of others and remember them. Since man lacks this overall view he easily forgets, with the result that another is hurt by lack of consideration.

Furthermore, each human being has a complete world within him which others cannot know, except by the limited outward expression of it that he wishes to give it. Thus it is ridiculous for us to fail to realize how little we know of others' needs and rights. All humanity is subject to this condition and it is unreasonable to expect that one individual should be perfectly understood; we have to rise above these little things. There is no question of not having rights, but of not demanding them; we do not have to be always ready to fight for them.

This is the objective explanation behind this form of renunciation; there is also a subjective one. When man acts, he always has a valid explanation for it, but others do not always see it. Thus a man's conscience may tell him that he is right, whereas his neighbors might condemn him. Teresa remarked that this is the moment to renounce self-defense. In this way she leads her reader toward her next counsel, which is, not to excuse oneself.

NOT EXCUSING ONESELF

The third practice of humility, which St. Teresa suggested for creating a spiritual atmosphere favorable to contemplation, consists in not excusing oneself. She wrote of it in the fifteenth chapter, first outlining in what it consists and then its motives.

She said that it is good to be silent when unjustly condemned, for this is great humility; she noted, however, that there are times when a man has to excuse himself to some degree. Once again Teresa exhibited her practicality: generosity always, but not exaggeration. She did not favor a man becoming a burden to others by the way in which he practiced virtue. Charity is the supreme virtue, and there are certain circumstances when silence might cause offense or scandal; someone may be disturbed, angered, hurt, or tempted thereby. But when discretion demands self-defense, man must temper it so that he does not lose completely the benefits of the humiliation.

Teresa herself left an example on the very day the first monastery of the Reform was founded. She was ordered to return at once to the monastery of the Incarnation to receive the censure of the Father Provincial. Her only thought was to imitate Jesus in His passion by her silence.

"I went to hear his judgement with the utmost happiness," she wrote, "thinking that there would now be something for me to suffer for the Lord. I could not discover that I had committed any offense . . . I remembered the trial of Christ and realized that this, by comparison, was nothing at all. I acknowledged my fault, as if I had acted very wrongly, and so in fact I must have appeared to have done to anyone who did not know all the reasons. The Provincial gave me a severe rebuke, though its severity was less than would have been justified by the report which many people had given him of my delinquency. I would not excuse myself, for I had already resolved not to do so, but begged him to forgive me, to punish me and not to be annoyed with me any longer.

"In some ways I knew quite well that they were condemning me unjustly . . . But in other ways it was clear to me that they were speaking the truth—in saying that I was more wicked than other nuns, and in asking how, if I had not kept all the numerous rules observed in that house, I could consider keeping stricter rules in another: I should be scandalizing the people, they said, and setting up new ideas. None of this caused me the least trouble or distress, though I gave the impression that it did, lest I should appear to be making light of what they were saying. Finally, I was commanded to state my version of the matter in the presence of the nuns."[8]

Such conduct brought her soul peace and sweetness, and God sustained her. When the time came for her to render the explanation demanded, neither Father Provincial nor the nuns found anything for which to condemn her. When the nuns left, the Superior spoke with her and was quite satisfied with the simple explanations she gave him; he even promised her permission to return to the new monastery as soon as the city had quieted down.

The second reason for not defending oneself flows from supernatural common sense. At times people will accuse a person of things that are not true, and he is unjustly corrected. But how many times does he err and no one notes it? Compensation is in order; besides, the Saint consoles her reader, it is better to be accused of faults one has not committed, than to have really committed them.

Here Teresa burst into one of the beautiful exclamations which escaped her when she felt a thing deeply: "Oh, my Lord! When I think in how many ways Thou didst suffer, and in all of them undeservedly, I know not what to say for myself, or what I can have been thinking about when I desired not to suffer, or what I am doing when I make excuses for myself. Thou knowest, my God, that if there is anything good in me it comes from no other hands than Thine own. For what is it to Thee, Lord, to give much instead of little? True, I do not deserve it, but neither have I deserved the favors which Thou hast shown me already. Can it be that I should wish a thing so evil as myself to be thought well of by anyone, when they have said such wicked things of Thee, Who art good above all other good? It is intolerable, my God, it is intolerable; nor would

[8] St. Teresa of Jesus, *Life*, XXXVI, 12, 13.

I that Thou shouldst have to tolerate anything displeasing in Thine eyes being found in Thy handmaiden. For see, Lord, mine eyes are blind and very little pleases them. Do Thou give me light and make me truly to desire that all should hate me, since I have so often left Thee, Who hast loved me with such faithfulness.

"What is this, my God? What advantage do we think to gain from giving pleasure to creatures? What does it matter to us if we are blamed by them all, provided we are without blame in the sight of the Lord?"

LIBERTY OF SPIRIT

Finally, St. Teresa described a great advantage of this practice. "It is in this way that you will begin to gain freedom; soon you will not care if they speak ill or well of you; it will seem like someone else's business . . ." Man obtains true inner solitude—more important than exterior solitude—which places him alone with God without any care except to please Him.

The person who, not from distain, but for virtue's sake, learns to remain serene and amiable when others judge ill of him, grows constantly in interior solitude and the habit of living with God. But one who pays attention to what others think and say of him easily comes to act to win others' esteem. To be accused or reproved disturbs him. Not having liberty of spirit, he has no interior solitude and wastes his time in these useless considerations.

Whoever wants to act only for God will try not to be concerned about the opinion of others. "This may seem impossible to those of us who are very sensitive and not very mortified. It is indeed difficult at first, but I know that, with the Lord's help, the attainment of this freedom, and of renunciation and self-detachment, is quite possible."

* * *

Later, in chapter twenty-nine, Teresa was to write of another phase of this liberty of spirit: the phase wherein one does not concern himself about the favor of superiors, about being in their good graces. The habit is hard to acquire but diligence in the quest for it will eventually obtain it.

What did Teresa mean by the "favors" or "good books" (ch. XXIX) of superiors? She meant their showing, explicitly or im-

plicitly, that they trust us and think highly of us. True, superiors owe goodwill to all alike, but they do not have to manifest it to all equally.

As natural satisfaction comes from finding that one's guides are pleased with us, it is a comfort needed by some. But it easily leads to self-seeking, to doing things well with the hidden desire to have them noticed, and so purity of intention is lost. Perhaps the person does not fall into sin at first, but he does stray away from the road of perfection, from seeking God alone; lacking this solace he loses his tranquillity. This is not perfection: "For the love of God, daughters, do not wish to be the favorite of your Superior" (ch. XXIX).

Of course, this does not mean one should be indifferent to the will of superiors and adapt the attitude "I act only for God and don't care about pleasing the superior." But it is our duty to please them by obeying them; then if they do not notice it, we ought not to torment ourselves. "You should each do your duty; and if this is not appreciated by your superior, you may be sure Our Lord will appreciate and reward it" (ch. XXIX).

Since anxiety about superiors' favor could harm souls, the Saint gave two remedies:—

1. *To remember that all things are passing.* "Let our thoughts always be fixed upon what endures, and not trouble themselves with earthly things which do not endure even for a lifetime" (ch. XXIX). And among these earthly things there is the pleasure stemming from the approval of superiors. "Never give way to these thoughts . . . Check them by remembering that your kingdom is not of this world, and that everything comes quickly to an end" (ibid.). This is a sort of philosophical consolation: everything is passing, so let us not pay too much attention to it—a good and effective means, but not the most perfect, even though it be used with a supernatural viewpoint. "That is a poor remedy and anything but a perfect one" (ibid.).

2. *To love humiliation.* There certainly is a little humiliation in doing all one can and then not receiving the esteem one might merit. Yet to have this happen does not surprise one who knows human nature; it follows upon human limitation. In judging persons, we are influenced by secondary things and often do not notice essentials; hence, our judgment is incomplete. We look more readily at the negative side than at the positive, because defects are more obvious.

And this applies, not only to the attitude of superiors towards

us, but also to that of all those who surround us. It is a satisfaction to feel about us a certain esteem, not manifested in words, but in so many little ways . . .

St. Teresa counselled her followers not to desire an escape from this state of humiliation—rather desire that it should continue, persuaded that one does not reach deep humility without humiliation.

"It is best that this state of things should continue, and that you should be humbled and out of favor, and should wish to be so for the sake of the Lord Who dwells in you. Turn your eyes upon yourself and look at yourself inwardly, as I have said. You will find your Master; He will not fail you: indeed, the less outward comfort you have, the greater the joy He will give you."

IV

CONCLUSION OF THE SECOND PART

The sixteenth chapter concludes the foundation section of the *Way of Perfection*. It summarizes Teresian thought on the virtues and links it with the following chapters which study prayer's contribution toward the possession of contemplation.

The first four paragraphs are in the first (but not in the second) manuscript of the *Way*. St. Teresa suppressed them in the latter, which still exists and shows that five pages have been torn out and replaced by only one, wherein the Saint probably summarized the thought of the suppressed pages. We cannot be absolutely certain of this, but everything indicates that these five pages must have been substantially the same as those in the Escorial manuscript giving the comparison of the game of chess. She must have deleted this example out of delicacy towards her daughters, to whom she forbids games. But she retained the idea, which is very important.

Thus we have the fifth paragraph written to replace the preceding ones. Editors, however, have generally restored the first four, for the comparison was very expressive.

There are three points in this chapter: first, the need of virtues to arrive at contemplation; second, the exceptions God is pleased to make at times—but they are *exceptions* which only confirm the rule; and third, a statement of her plan to treat of contemplation; thus this chapter serves as a transit to the following part.

In the first part of the *Way of Perfection* Teresa insisted again and again on sincere generosity in the practice of the virtues. Once again, at this point, she repeated this teaching: "It may seem to you that too much has been asked, but really it has not." Like the chess player, she has done no more than set out the pieces. In this game the object is to take "the king"; but first must come the placing of the pieces, the chief of which is "the queen"; then follows skillful maneuvering, especially of the "queen", who has great power over the king. In other words, St. Teresa remarked that up to this point her book has been merely a placing of the pieces, but now it is time to move them; that it, it does not suffice to form great plans of virtue; we also have to apply ourselves.

"It is the queen which gives the king most trouble in this game and all the other pieces support her. There is no queen who can beat this King as well as humility can; for humility brought Him down from heaven into the Virgin's womb and with humility we can draw Him into our souls by a single hair. And doubtless, the greater our humility, the more entirely shall we possess Him, and the weaker it is, the more reluctantly will He dwell within us" (ch. XVI).

Why this pressing invitation to practice humility? If it were only meditation, certainly all this would not be necessary as foundation, because meditation itself should help in the practice of virtue. But the goal is contemplation.

"If you had asked me about meditation, I could have talked to you about it, and advised you all to practise it, even if you do not possess the virtues. For this is the first step to be taken towards the acquisition of the virtues . . . But contemplation is another matter . . . for this King does not allow Himself to be taken except by one who surrenders wholly to Him." Here, then, is the reason for asking so much: the soul surrenders to God only by the generous exercise of virtue and only in this way will it succeed in conquering the King, that is, in being introduced into His intimacy, into holy contemplation. It is the same thought we read further back: He "does not give Himself wholly until we are giving ourselves wholly to Him"; and we can now understand the remark with reference to contemplation.

In the fifth paragraph, which was to have taken the place of the first four which she suppressed, this idea is repeated. ("Mental prayer" is here used in the sense of "meditation".) "Therefore, if you want me to tell you the way to attain to contemplation, do allow me to speak at some length about these things, even if at the time they do not seem to you very important, for I think myself that they are. If you have no wish either to hear about them or to practise them, continue your mental prayer all your life."

And because she has spoken so decidedly, a thought drawn from her own experience here presented itself to her: it can happen that God does not wait for the soul to be generous to give it this gift. But we must not misunderstand her: this does not happen normally, but only by an act of mercy. It is an exception which confirms the rule, because if this soul is not truly faithful, what God has given it will not last. "God is sometimes

pleased to show great favor to persons who are in an evil state, so that by this means He may snatch them out of the hands of the devil."

This expression, "evil state", has raised a discussion among theologians. Some have thought there was question of mortal sin, from which God would make the soul rise by means of a contemplative grace. But comparing the two manuscripts of the Escorial and of Valladolid shows that such was not the Saint's thought. One not in the grace of God can receive a grace "gratis data" (for example, a vision) but not contemplation, which is the fruit of the development of grace in the soul. Father John of Jesus and Mary, O. C. D., said that this grace "gratis data" would actually be a grace of conversion.[1] In fact, some think this was the case with St. Paul, though it is not known whether he really was in a state of serious sin. However, St. Teresa was referring to the state of tepidity or little fervor.

God, then, comes to solicit this soul; if the individual does not correspond, He will not continue His favors and he will not advance. But if he is faithful He will not stop until He has carried him very high: He will make him progress to the state of contemplative union with Him. He will be among His "beloved children".

"For my own part I believe there are many souls whom God our Lord tests in this way, but few who prepare themselves to enjoy this favor always. When our Lord does this and we ourselves leave nothing undone either, I think it is certain that He never ceases from giving until He has brought us to a very high degree of prayer. If we do not give ourselves to His Majesty as resolutely as He gives Himself to us, He will be doing more than enough for us if He leaves us in mental prayer and from time to time visits us as He would visit servants in His vineyard. But these others are His beloved children, whom He would never want to banish from His side; and as they have no desire to leave Him, He never does so. He seats them at His table, and feeds them with His own food, almost taking the food from His mouth in order to give it them" (ch. XVI).

She concluded the chapter by a call to renewed fervor. Let her follower concentrate on the way of contemplation which is that of the perfect life, of intense virtue. This involves the

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[1] Cf. Joannes a Jesu Maria, OCD, *Theologia mystica,* c. III, Freiburg 1912, pp. 38-39.

intellect first, which should keep its attention fixed upon this way. Then the will must play its part: before a particularly demanding act of virtue let us never say, to excuse ourselves, that we are not saints. If God asks generous virtue of us, it is to help us to become saints; His grace will never fail us.

Here she made another allusion to the practice of humility, about which she spoke in the preceding chapters: "We refuse to be thwarted over the very smallest matter of precedence . . . God deliver us from saying 'We are not angels', or 'We are not saints', whenever we commit some imperfection. We may not be; but what a good thing it is for us to reflect that we can be if we will only try and if God gives us His hand. Do not be afraid that He will fail to do His part if we do not fail to do ours."

Then Teresa announced the theme which was to begin with chapter XVII: an explanation of the nature of mental prayer and contemplation. And here ends the ascetical part of the *Way of Perfection.*

Part III

The Fount of Living Water

I

DISPOSITIONS

The works of St. Teresa are all treatises on prayer. If in the *Way of Perfection* she spoke at such length about the virtues, it was because these are the foundation for prayer and prepare the spiritual climate in which it can become contemplative.

St. Teresa was undoubtedly a great writer, but her works abound in digressions. From one point of view this is a fault, but it adds force and completeness to her expression. Her disciple soon perceives that these digressions do not hinder the development of the thought; actually, once she ended the digression she resumed the train of thought that had seemed last.

This style shows itself especially in her *Way;* although there is a logical order, she continually anticipated what she wished to say later. She would have liked to tell everything about the life of prayer all at once. She was eager to have her readers put their hearts into their mental prayer, so that it might later become contemplative.

But what is the order in this part of her book? There are two main points: first, the soul's attitude toward the gift of contemplation; second, two principles in regard to contemplation.

First, then, the right attitude toward this divine gift. Teresa knew that the treatment of this matter was a very delicate matter. On one hand, contemplation is a free gift which God gives to whom He will, when He will, as He will, and, on the other hand, there is question of our attitude towards it. We must think of it *humbly,* not thinking we have a right to contemplation (ch. XVII), with *generosity* (ch. XVIII), with *lively desire* (ch. XIX) and with *complete resignation* (ch. XX). These are important chapters which, while they describe the individual's attitude toward contemplation, anticipate many ideas about the life of prayer which Teresa treated in more detail later.

Then (the second point we mentioned above) the Saint taught two principles which she had already stated; but, from the middle of chapter twenty, she began to treat them more explicitly, continuing till the end of chapter twenty-five. These are: (1) the life of prayer requires effort, and (2) the prayer must be mental prayer.

With regard to the effort: one should be resolved to conse-

crate his whole life to it, for it is a way (that of prayer) on which he must travel and continue to travel until he reaches the end. She suggested solutions to various hindrances: impossibility, health, etc. If one is not capable of methodical meditation it does not matter: there are other ways of making mental prayer. She would show what the essence of prayer is when freed from accessories: namely, elevation of the mind to God, touching Him with our intellect and will. She would say: yes, recite your vocal prayers, but that is not enough; you must understand to Whom you speak, and who you are who speak: the Creator and the creature, the Father and the son; and then also know the Teacher, the blessed Jesus, and what He teaches. One who learns to think of this makes mental prayer even while he recites his vocal prayers. And only mental prayer leads to contemplation.

RESIGNATION

A man must not think he has a right to contemplation. A truly humble person makes no claim to it. Teresa had insisted so much in the preceding chapters on showing that contemplation develops in an environment where virtue flourishes; she now asked: "How can anyone who is truly humble think himself as good as those who become contemplatives?" (ch. XVII). No one should expect contemplation before reaching heroic virtue, and no one ought to believe he has reached heroic virtue, especially heroic humility. St. Teresa of the opinion that we should never believe our virtue so firmly established that we would claim the gift of contemplation as a reward.

Yet, while the person applies himself diligently to the practice of virtue, he must not abandon his desire for contemplation. But if God is not pleased to grant him contemplation he should not become downcast; there are many ways of serving God. We ought never to renounce hope of contemplation, but neither ought we to demand it at once: we need to know how to wait, surrendering ourselves to God. This is the way to receive His graces.

But why did St. Teresa insist so much on these thoughts? First of all, because contemplation is a gift and not a right; then, because the ways of God are many and different and God does not conduct all souls—not even two, says St. John of the Cross[1]—by the same way. God gives this gift according to His good

[1] *Flame*, III, 59.

pleasure. The practice of virtue leads to sanctity, which is much more important than contemplation; contemplation is only a means to sanctity, sanctity is the goal. It is true that the center of the spiritual life is love and that contemplation is a great aid in reaching perfect love; still, it is only a means.

Even those whom God does not conduct by the way of contemplation should do as the others, that is, prepare themselves, because no one knows when God wishes to give this gift. Sometimes it comes very late. Teresa cited her own case as an example: "I myself spent over fourteen years without ever being able to meditate except while reading" (ch. XVII). So she was far from being immersed in contemplation, and "there must be many people like this."

And there are those who cannot even meditate, but have to just go gleaning here and there in their books, as St. Therese did. There are others who cannot even do this, "but can only recite vocal prayers, in which they chiefly occupy themselves". Teresa felt great pity for these restless spirits who can never concentrate; later she was to show them how to make vocal prayer in a way that might lead them to contemplation. She mentioned the example of an old woman she knew: "I know a very old woman, leading a most excellent life, penitent and a great servant of God, who for many years has been spending hours and hours in vocal prayer, but from mental prayer can get no help at all; the most she can do is to dwell upon each of her vocal prayers as she says them. There are a great many other people just like this . . ."; she even knew of persons consecrated to the life of prayer who do not go any farther than this.

"They will not, I think, be any the worse off in the end. They may feel safer, for we cannot tell if consolations come from God or are sent by the devil."

She also gave the example of St. Martha, who "was holy, but we are not told that she was a contemplative" (ibid.). As to the possibility of reaching perfection, she saw no difference between the two classes; she had just said: "You must not be afraid that you will fail to attain the perfection of the greatest contemplatives." If St. Martha "had been absorbed in devotion all the time as the Magdalen was, there would have been no one to prepare a meal for this Divine Guest."

It might be one's own fault that he did not attain contemplation; he might have been unfaithful. But we never know for certain, since it remains God's own gift. "Be sure that, if you

do what lies in your power and prepare yourself for contemplation with the perfection aforementioned, then, if He does not grant it you (and I think He will not fail to do so if you have true detachment and humility), it will be because He has laid up this joy for you so as to give it you in heaven" (ibid.). She was convinced that God would give it; if not in its fullness, at least a little.

Teresa ended the discussion by repeating that the choice is not left to us. All would have chosen contemplation, thinking thus to enjoy greater repose and consolation. No one should think he has any claim to contemplation; he should prepare himself, for otherwise he might not be ready for the divine invitation. If he prepares himself well and yet has to wait, God will know how to recompense him generously in the other life. Teresa felt certain, however, that God would grant a sincere man some form of contemplation, perhaps only briefly.

CONTEMPLATION AND SUFFERING

Man's attitude towards God's free gift of contemplation should be one of humble abandonment and great generosity. Generosity in being faithful to prayer, yes, but also in preparing the proper atmosphere or climate for it.

Saint Teresa wrote about this atmosphere of contemplation: "Those who are following this road . . . are not bearing a lighter cross than you; you would be amazed at all the ways and manners in which God sends them crosses . . . I am well aware that the trials given by God to contemplatives are intolerable" (ch. XVIII). Those who have not received contemplative graces may find a motive of humility in these thoughts, thinking that, if they do not receive such graces, it is because they might not yet be capable of suffering so much and therefore God holds back.

But this introduction is merely a pretext to introduce a very important truth: a person who wishes to reach contemplation must be willing to suffer. The sufferings of contemplatives are always great. This can be a consolation in a way, because one can think: I should not be able to bear them. But that is true only up to a certain point, because a loving soul will always think, "God can strengthen me." One can always ask Him to do that.

A contemplative enters into God's intimacy and knows intuitively that Jesus always draws one He unites to Himself by the way of the cross: a spouse cannot do less than follow the

lot of his Spouse; sharing His life he will fill up what is lacking in His Passion. Jesus counts on him to participate in His sufferings and in His redemptive work.

There is no necessity to feel delight in suffering or to attempt forcing oneself to have this feeling; the spiritual life does not rest on feeling, but on the will with which we accept the suffering God sends us. An acute physical or spiritual suffering does not mean anything if it does not cost us anything, but if it costs, it is precious before God, because then we give Him most. Jesus suffered thus, even to the point of saying: "My soul is ready to die with sorrow" (Matt. XXVI, 38). "To suffer with joy," said St. Thérèse, "does not mean to suffer with delight, but with serenity, with complete abandoment." How many times had she reached the depth and felt she could do no more! But that did not matter, for she gave all her strength, and it was then that Jesus came to her rescue.

Here St. Teresa anticipated a thought to which she would return more in detail when she comments on the Pater noster, at the words "Fiat voluntas tua" (ch. XXXII). "Since God leads those whom He most loves by the way of trials, the more He loves them, the greater will be their trials" (ch. XVIII, first paragraph). Certainly, when God calls a person to His intimacy by means of an abundance of contemplative graces, that person should expect to be introduced into the way of the cross also; that is one of the signs that God loves him.

And now that she had shown what generosity it takes to prepare for contemplation, St. Teresa returned (4th paragraph) to the idea that we should *all* prepare ourselves. She realized that temperaments differ; and so do manners of making mental prayer. Though she used the words "vocal prayer," it is certainly not mere reciting them that she recommended. She also mentioned meditative reading and conversations with God: all different ways of devoting the set time to prayer.

Anyone who is not faithful to this set time misses an appointment, as it were, and runs the risk of arriving after the door is closed and so loses God's graces. God has His hours and if a person does not keep his engagement with Him he feels the consequences in his spiritual life.

RESPONSIBILITY OF CONTEMPLATIVES

Saint Teresa explained that a contemplative should be willing to suffer; now she returned to the responsibility such a one

has in the Church (ch. XVIII, 5th paragraph). We know from the dogma of the communion of saints that everyone has some responsibility, and those explicitly called to help the Church have the greater duty in this regard. Contemplatives should not forget that the more abundant contemplative grace is, the more generous they ought to be. If God, by means of contemplation, calls a person to intimacy with Himself, He is calling him to share in Jesus' life, and consequently to help on the way of the cross. So a contemplative must be generous or he will disappoint God.

God's interests are vast and a person of prayer should be continually occupied with them. For them God asks the daily sufferings which are sometimes so heavy because of their persistence. It is not easy to be always serene and joyous, remembering that all this is willed by God for our good, nourishing our apostolic ideal with continual immolation, making no reserves in this crucifying life. And if sometimes God allows the suffering to go to the limit of our strength, all our power will come from Him. When He asks more of us He will also help us more.

* * *

Toward the end of this chapter (XVIII) Teresa again wrote about what one can do to prepare himself for contemplation. The first time it was prayer she emphasized, now it is virtue. Again she repeated that the soul's progress consists much more in the virtues than in contemplative graces, helpful though the latter are. This is true progress: if contemplation has any importance it is because it makes the soul more generous.

In naming the virtues she tarried a moment on obedience, but then remarked that the nuns to whom she was writing already knew this virtue very well, and so she would not enlarge upon it. She wrote of it at greater length in the fifth chapter of the *Foundations.*

Let us conclude with St. Teresa by saying that the preparation for contemplation should be very fervent. We should cultivate a contemplative mentality, that is, a spirit of generosity, so that we can really welcome suffering—in the concrete.

II

THE LIVING WATER

St. Teresa praised a lively desire for contemplation; in chapter XIX she set out to show how one can dispose himself for it in actual practice. She considered it a proximate goal toward which we should tend.

The Saint had a tendency to return time and again to topics which she felt were of utmost importance. Hence at the beginning of chapter XIX, after a long digression, she could not remember what point she had reached and did not want to lose time rereading what she had already written, so she spoke anew of the need to apply oneself to mental prayer. As a good teacher she realized that not all individuals are alike and that each must discover for himself the way God desires him to follow.

Teresa began with the most normal case—though it may not be the most frequent—which is that of those who can follow a determined method in meditation. In St. Teresa's time various writers had already written books suitable for meditation.

Besides the Exercises of St. Ignatius (containing the method for meditation, not the application), there were the books by Luis de Granada, the Dominican, and St. Peter of Alcantara, the Franciscan. St. Teresa knew these books and recommended them, and even referred to those of Luis de Granada when she wrote in this chapter XIX: "There are books in which the mysteries of Our Lord's life and His Passion are described in short passages, one for each day of the week; there are also meditations on the Judgment, on hell, on our own nothingness and on all that we owe to God, and these books are excellent both as to their teaching and as to the way in which they plan the beginning and the end of the time of prayer." Anyone who travels by such a good road, she said, would be brought by God "to the harbor of light. If he begins so well, his end will be good also."

So there is no doubt that the Saint approved of methods in meditation. "All who can walk along this road will walk restfully and securely, for one always walks restfully when the understanding is kept in restraint", that is, when the intellect remains on a subject and studies it, thus avoiding distractions and reaching good resolutions. Certainly a soul who has facility in doing this is well disposed for contemplation and has only to practise the self-denial so much recommended by the Saint

throughout the entire second part of the *Way*.

DIFFICULTIES

Yet Teresa observed that not all are capable of methodical meditation. She did not, however, dispense them from mental prayer; perhaps they cannot make it in a methodical manner, but they can make it equally well—and it is precisely of this she wrote in the part of the *Way* which remains for us to explain. She sought to come to their aid and teach them how to prepare themselves for contemplation and intimacy with God.

"There are some souls, and some minds, as unruly as horses not yet broken in. No one can stop them: now they go this way, now that way; they are never still. Some people are either like this by nature or God permits them to become so" (ch. XIX). They are tormented by distractions; it is difficult for them to concentrate. St. Teresa was not alarmed and did not say that they cannot reach contemplation on that account; but they do have to follow another method to make their prayer. "I am very sorry for them," said the Saint.

Their difficulty may come from a natural defect, or from passing circumstances which God permits to make their minds wander. St. Thérèse, for example, experienced distractions because the drowsiness she suffered made it hard for her to concentrate. St. John of the Cross speaks of still another cause when treating of contemplation with indistinct and loving attention; he notes that in those whom God draws to this kind of prayer a certain movement of the imagination remains, and makes prayer wearisome at times. In all these cases we should try to help ourselves, but not always in the same way.

Reading is one of the ways Teresa mentioned in the last chapter. She was to show later that she did not wish us to resort to a book in every moment of aridity, even though it is accompanied by distractions; for at times God wishes us to have patience and stay there in silence in His presence, desiring Him.

But when some natural circumstance, physical or psychical, causes the dryness, then is the time she counseled recourse to a book. This is when St. Thérèse used one. Though it did not always remedy matters, still we know from her writings that many a time, after she had faithfully tried to help herself through her prayertime with a book and still remained dry, at the end she received light leading her ever farther along that "little way" of hers which she was later to show others.

"Some people . . . when, after all their labor—and the labor is tremendous—they have conquered the first of their enemies . . . allow themselves to be conquered by the second, and they prefer to die of thirst rather than drink water which is going to cost them so much trouble. Their strength has come to an end; their courage has failed them; and though some of them are strong enough to conquer their second enemies as well as their first, when they meet the third group their strength comes to an end, though perhaps they are only a couple of steps from the fountain of living water, of which Our Lord said to the Samaritan woman that whosoever drinks of it shall not thirst again."

CONTEMPLATION

The beautiful incident of the Samaritan woman recalled to Teresa what she had promised her daughters to write about. For her the living water was contemplation. When she wrote she aimed at awakening in her reader a desire for it. Coupled with this desire Teresa added fidelity to the practice of mental prayer and the exercise of the virtues.

"In this life the soul will never thirst for anything more, although its thirst for things in the life to come will exceed any natural thirst that we can imagine here below." Here again is the Saint's fundamental thought: contemplation is a great help to turn a person totally towards God. Great souls grasp the truth that only God can satisfy man, so that there is nothing else to be done but to go on toward Him, and that whoever does not reach Him will be unhappy forever. Human life is a road to God, a continual traveling towards Him. Contemplation is a powerful assistance on the journey for it gathers up all one's energies and turns them toward God; one no longer thirsts for other things, but only to please God.

But note: contemplation is not perfection. For St. Teresa perfection is always the perfection of love, expressed by adhering to God's will. But contemplation helps immensely to put us in this disposition, and that is why she felt forced to speak of it. She continued Our Lord's metaphor of the "living water"; thinking of the benefits of water in the natural order, she went on to consider the same qualities in the supernatural order. She would speak of that ineffable water which is contemplation and, in particular, of three of its properties. (She considered it in

its fullness: unitive contemplation.[1] Not all contemplation is unitive; there are different grades in which such properties are met in lesser measure.)

What are these qualities?

Water cools, cleanses, and quenches thirst.

* * *

Water cools: the spiritual water of contemplation cools and slakes thirst for earthly things, leaving a man longing only for those of heaven; it refreshes by making detachment easier.

Contemplation which has become unitive supposes that a person has attained a certain perfection in virtue, especially charity. Sometimes God does give this grace to an imperfect individual, but normally it supposes a strong love, full conformity of one's own will with that of God. Teresa enlarged this comparison with natural water by adding what happens when water is thrown on a pitch or tar fire: the flames grow fiercer. Now, when a soul receives unitive contemplation, it is already strong in love, and the water of contemplation makes the fire of its love burn the more, because these two have the same origin: the love of charity infused by God into the soul.

Theologically speaking, the prayer of union supposes that God strongly attracts the individual's love. When a soul is already burning with love stemming from its own initiative, it burns much more when God attracts it, as He does through unitive contemplation. Thus it becomes a great aid to carry souls towards God: it reinvigorates them before temptations and the attractions of creatures. If man's whole life is nothing but a search for God, the paramount importance of this grace becomes quite obvious.

Here Teresa made reference to the tears of love for God which are sometimes shed in this prayer. These too come from God, yet they are not that living water which kindles the fire of love; rather, they flow from it.

* * *

Water cleanses: the second property of perfect contemplation is to cleanse. Union with God is impossible without perfect purity of soul. The water of contemplation purifies, removes the dross, and makes the soul more pleasing to God. Here again

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[1] That she intends to speak of unitive contemplation is stated explicitly in paragraph 6: "This water, . . . this divine union is something quite supernatural."

the Saint spoke of unitive contemplation and, recalling her personal experience, hinted at what she narrated in the book of her *Life*[2] which actually is the story of all souls. After having struggled for a long time against a defect without succeeding in freeing herself from it, Teresa was freed from it in a moment, when God gave her the prayer of union. It is always thus: God wishes that man exert himself; finally, He will come and raise him Himself.

Perfect contemplation is a powerful means to detachment and purification; but not unitive contemplation only, for the lesser degrees also have this cleansing force, though in minor and progressive grades, as St. John of the Cross has said. He insisted strongly on this purifying character of contemplation; and there is no better exposition of it than his pages on the night of sense in which, by means of purifying graces, God prepares the soul for initial contemplation and then, by very severe trials, for unitive contemplation. Even the latter does not lose the purifying quality proper to contemplation, though it has this quality in a minor degree.

Here then is a new phase of contemplation, one which should make it desirable, not for the enjoyment flowing from it, but for the help it gives to enter more fully into the life of love. The aim of perfection is love; the purpose of the contemplative life, as has been said, is to help towards this aim.

To make us understand better how contemplative grace purifies, St. Teresa made a comparison between meditation and contemplation. In meditation recollections of worldly concern may intrude on our reasonings, and, if we are not on the alert, our attention may wander. In the prayer of union this danger does not exist, for the contemplative grace, proper to this prayer, prevents the soul from being distracted. Even in the lower forms of contemplation this property is verified, though in a minor way; in the prayer of quiet the soul can still be distracted but, as it feels God drawing it, it finds it easy to remain with Him.

* * *

The third property of water is that it quenches thirst. But the water of contemplation, instead of taking away thirst, increases man's thirst for the things of God. A taste of this water kindles such great thirst that one cannot think of anything else except to taste God more. Then follows a powerful orientation

[2] Cf. St. Teresa of Jesus, *Life*, XXIV, 6.

toward God: all the soul's energies turn to Him. Contemplation is not desired for the pleasure it gives, but it is a fact that this pleasure does help orientate one toward Him. In contemplation man tastes his God—even though it may be only a little—and this distant participation in heavenly beatitude greatly arouses his hope. And hope stimulates the exercise of love.

Here the Saint observed that the desire of heaven, which the soul carries away from unitive contemplation, can be influenced by natural sensitivity. This influence should be moderated. The mystical Doctor, St. John of the Cross, says in the *Flame*[3] that in persons who have reached the spiritual marriage this desire is totally abandoned to the will of God, because harmony is complete: nature is completely subject and cannot disturb the spirit any longer. We can gather from her sixth *Relation* that when St. Teresa was near the end of her life, her soul experienced complete resignation to God. But in the espousals this is not the case, and nature, which always seeks its enjoyment, may enter into this desire for God. In the impulses which one may feel, he ought not believe that everything is perfect; vigilance and control are always necessary. It is simply a matter of common sense, confirmed by theology.

Thus contemplation is a very desirable gift, not so much because it causes one to enjoy God, but because it is a strong incentive along the way of love. Contemplation quickens the most sublime love, that of benevolence; it makes man solicitous for God's interests.

THE DIVINE INVITATION

"Why do you suppose, daughters, that I have tried to describe the end of the battle before it has begun and to point to its reward by telling you about the blessing which comes from drinking of the heavenly source of this living water?" (ch. XIX).

The "end" she spoke of is contemplation, the crown bestowed on the struggle. And she "told us about the blessing which comes from drinking of the heavenly source of this living water" by considering how contemplation detaches one more and more from the world and orientates him ever more towards God, concentrating his heart in God.

"I have done this so that you may not be distressed at the trials and annoyances of the road, and may tread it with courage and not grow weary; for . . . it may be that, when you have

[3] St. John of the Cross, *Flame*, I, 23.

arrived, and have only to stoop and drink of the spring, you may fail to do so and lose this blessing, thinking that you have not the strength to attain it and that it is not for you."

If the call to contemplation were not for everyone, one might ask himself: "Am I among these privileged souls?" And an apparent humility might make him answer: "But it is such a sublime thing!" Everyone is invited to sanctity, and the Saint added very energetically that everyone is invited to contemplation also.

"If His invitation were not for all, God would not have called us all, and even though He called us, He would not have said: 'I will give you to drink.' He might have said: 'Come, all of you, for after all you will lose nothing by coming; and I will give drink to those whom I think fit for it.' But as He said we were all to come, without making this condition, I feel sure that none will fail to receive this living water unless they falter by the way" (ch. XIX).

This affirmation is explicit: God calls each one of us personally, individually, and wishes to give us contemplation, on condition that we go on to the end and do not stop on the road halfway.

But doubt may arise in regard to what Teresa has said in the preceding chapters, that is, that not all go by the same road: some souls are contemplative, others are not, and the latter too can become saints. But if there are saints who are not contemplatives, then the call to contemplation must not be universal.

Intelligent as the Saint was, she could not have failed to see this apparent contradiction. She said that heaven can be reached by different ways and that one of them lacks the gift of contemplation. "In this last chapter I seem to have been contradicting what I had previously said, as, in consoling those who had not reached the contemplative state, I told them that the Lord had different roads by which they might come to Him, just as He also had many mansions" (ch. XX).

"His Majesty, being Who He is and understanding our weakness, has provided for us" (ibid.). Though inviting all to the greatest heights, He does not use force. He does not make it a condition for eternal salvation to accept His invitation.

Besides, not all the saints in heaven have the same degree of charity; this depends on individuals, for God will be generous with generous souls. Since contemplation is a gift of God, St. Teresa insists on our generosity. In fact, she insisted that suffer-

ing creates the atmosphere in which contemplation is born. Souls who are not very generous are the ones who will not receive contemplation. And, quite naturally, many are frightened by the invitation to go up to Calvary.

But He does not bar the way to anyone. "He did not say: 'Some must come by this way and others by that.' His mercy is so great that He has forbidden none to strive to come and drink of this fountain of life." And as proof the Saint used her years of unfaithfulness, during which she had allowed herself to be shackled with affection for creatures. "What good reasons there would have been for His forbidding me! But as He did not order me to cease . . . it is certain that He will forbid no one to come: indeed, He calls us publicly, and in a loud voice, to do so.

"Yet, as He is so good, He does not force us . . ." (ibid.); one can also go by a longer road, on which one suffers less.

* * *

Though God invites all, He does not give all to drink in the same manner, even though they correspond with complete generosity. We have examples in St. Teresa of Jesus and St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus: the latter certainly did not go by the way described so minutely by the Saint of Avila and St. John of the Cross, but who could say that she was not a contemplative, an enlightened soul, enlightened by loving experience? She did not experience the many kinds of prayer described in the writings of these saints, but she had so much light from God that she herself confesses that at twenty-two she was inundated with it, even though she was living in that aridity which was habitual to her.

He "enables those who wish to follow Him to drink in many ways so that none may lack comfort or die of thirst. For from this rich spring flow many streams—some large, others small, and also little pools for children, which they find quite large enough, for the sight of a great deal of water would frighten them: by children, I mean those who are in the early stages" (ch. XX). In short, one can drink of the fountain of living water in many ways and God gives to each to drink as is best for his soul. This fountain is actually the operation of the Holy Spirit, contemplative light, which God infuses into the soul by means of the experience of love. It will differ because of its intimate relationship to some definite state of prayer, but what does it matter whether a person be enlightened in an ecstasy or in the

midst of his daily occupations, provided he thus learns God's will for him more and more clearly?

"Therefore, sisters, have no fear that you will die of thirst on this road; you will never lack the water of comfort so completely that your thirst will be intolerable."

"Take my advice and do not tarry on the way, but strive like strong men until you die in the attempt, for we are here for nothing else than to strive. If you always pursue this determination to die rather than fail to reach the end of the road, Our Lord may let you suffer a little from thirst in this life . . ."

"May Our Lord grant us never to fail Him," Teresa concluded (ch. XX); respond to His invitation by the three virtues she recommended so strongly: detachment from all created things, love for each other, and true humility—and by fidelity to prayer.

III

RESOLUTION AND COURAGE

St. Teresa detailed the healthy, balanced attitude towards contemplation: desire coupled with resignation, with the general awareness that it is a goal to seek, although it remains a free gift of God. By contemplation we mean the divine intimacy towards which the whole interior life is directed.

At this point St. Teresa began a lengthy explanation of the development of the life of prayer, and used the Pater Noster as a guide. She started with two concepts: first, the individual must resolve to apply himself diligently to prayer as long as he lives (that is, to go on to the end, cost what it may); second, a correct notion of what mental prayer is and the way by which it prepares one for contemplation.

* * *

Teresa knew human nature, and she realized that there are persons who linger unnecessarily on the brink of determining to dedicate themselves to prayer. Like a good mother and with psychological insight she sought to encourage these hesitating persons by suggesting that they apply themselves gradually but consistently: "I do not mean to say that no one who has not the resolution that I am going to describe should set out upon the road, for Our Lord will gradually bring her nearer to perfection. And even if she did no more than take one step, this alone has such virtue that there is no fear of her losing by it or of failing to be very well rewarded" (ch. XX). Then she introduced a comparison with an indulgenced chaplet: "Whoever recites it once gains something, and the more she uses it the more she will gain." One who only applies himself to prayer from time to time will receive a little light on the day he does so and feel an urge to do it oftener; thus he will grow in his determination.

Here she was not speaking of her daughters. To them she would say, "For you this is not enough!" Teresa was writing here to persons living in the secular society who desired to live a life of prayer patterned after the absolute dedication to it characteristic of Carmel. Thus she advised her followers: when

you have the occasion, show persons whom you see are disposed how they can profit by living in a spirit of prayer. She meant mental prayer particularly, but whatever kind of prayer is taught to souls will always be of great profit to them.

AN OBJECTION

"Let us now return to those who wish to travel on this road, without halting until they reach their goal, which is the place where they can drink of this water of life. As I say, it is most important—all important, indeed—that they should begin well by making an earnest and most determined resolve" (ch. XXI), not merely for some periods of life but for all of it, with all their hearts, to make their prayer ever more intimate, and to drink of this fountain. All do not drink in the same way, yet all should drink. "Whatever may come, whatever may happen to them, however hard they may have to labor, whoever may complain of them . . ."

But now Teresa paused to answer an objection common in her time: "It is dangerous; . . . enough for them to say their Pater noster and Ave Maria."

When St. Teresa began to practice prayer in earnest and mentioned this to her spiritual friends, they were frightened and, believing her deluded by the devil, tried to put her on her guard. The Saint began to live in fear, until she met with theologians expert in this doctrine. We ought not be surprised since great confusion had been caused in Spain at that time by certain deluded persons; thus, when there was question of the graces of prayer, many feared. "Again and again people will say to us: 'It is dangerous', 'So-and-so was lost through doing this', 'Someone else got into wrong ways', 'Some other person, who was always praying, fell just the same', 'It is bad for virtue', 'It is not meant for women; it may lead them into delusions', 'They would do better to stick to their spinning', 'These subtleties are of no use to them', 'It is quite enough for them to say their Pater noster and Ave Maria' " (ch. XXI).

The Saint had a ready answer: "With this last remark I quite agree. Of course it is enough!" but I will show you what the Pater Noster contains. "It is always a great thing to base your prayer on prayers which were uttered by such lips as Our Lord's. People are quite right to say this, and, were it not for our great weakness and the lukewarmness of our devotion, there would be no need for any other systems of prayer or for any other

books at all. I am speaking to souls who cannot recollect themselves by meditating . . . minds so ingenious that nothing is good enough for them. So I think I will start to lay down some rules for each part of our prayer—beginning, middle and end—although I shall not spend long on the higher stages." This is the plan of the fourth part of her book, for which she employed the Pater noster.

In Spain the reaction against Protestantism had been vigorous; to remove all danger the Inquisition had forbidden a quantity of books—among them some dear to St. Teresa. She alluded to this fact: "They cannot take books from you so completely as not to leave you this good book, and if you keep on with humility you need nothing more." And she adds a parenthetical thought which we find also in St. Thérèse: "I have always been fond of the words of the Gospels and have found more recollection in them than in the most carefully planned books."

"I do not say that I will explain these divine prayers (the petitions of the Pater), for that I should not presume to do, and there are a great many explanations of them already. . . . But I will write down a few thoughts on the words of the Pater noster" as a point of departure to teach us to pray, to speak with God.

As a second answer to the objection St. Teresa showed that we are all journeying to this fountain which is God Himself and we shall all reach it in eternity. This fountain of living water is the possession of God, but beginning even in this life we can drink of it, some in one way, some in another. All are aiming at this fount; well then, by prayer they travel on a king's highway. On any other way they will die of thirst: "How incomparably greater must be the risks they run! And yet they have no idea of this until they fall headlong into some real danger. Having no one to help them, they lose this water altogether . . . How do you suppose they can do without a drop of it and yet travel along a road on which there are so many adversaries to fight?" (ch. XXI).

"Take my advice, then, and let none mislead you by showing you any other road than that of prayer."

And a third rebuttal of the objection: it is an alarm invented by the devil to frighten souls. "I have never heard of such a wicked invention"; it is contrary to common sense. It is true that there are some who desire to be thought saintly; in Spain at that very time the deluded Magdalen of the Cross had gained

a whole circle of admirers. But if one person has fallen through his own bad dispositions, how many more have been elevated to great perfection by this way!

"See how blind the world is! It never thinks of all the thousands who have fallen into heresies and other great evils through yielding to distractions and not practising prayer. As against these multitudes there are a few who did practise prayer whom the devil has been successful enough at his own trade to cause to fall: in doing this he has also caused some to be very much afraid of virtuous practices. Let those who make use of this pretext to absolve themselves from such practices take heed, for in order to save themselves from evil they are fleeing from good."

Therefore, we have to react against such deceptions of the devil. "The true servant of God . . . when beset by these fears . . . only desires the more not to stop . . . One man, or perhaps two, can do more by telling the truth than can a great many men all together (against it) . . . If people say there is danger in prayer, this servant of God, by his deeds if not by his words, tries to make them realize what a good thing it is. If they say that frequent communion is inadvisable, he only practises it the more. So, because just one or two are fearlessly following the better path, the Lord gradually regains what He had lost" (ch. XXI).

Teresa concluded: "Cease troubling about these fears . . . and never pay heed to such matter of popular opinion. . . . Endeavor always to have a good conscience; practise humility; despise all worldly things; and believe firmly in the teaching of our Holy Mother Church. You may then be quite sure that you are on a good road."

In the following chapter (XXII) the Saint showed that vocal prayer cannot be made well if not accompanied by mental prayer: "If they tell you that you should practise only vocal prayer, ask whether your mind and heart ought not to be in what you say. If they answer 'Yes'—and they cannot do otherwise —you see they are admitting that you are bound to practise mental prayer, and even contemplation, if God should grant it you."

KEEPING ON WITH PRAYER

Chapter XXIII gives the reasons for life-long application to prayer and speaks then of the hope (for St. Teresa it was a certainty) of arriving at the fountain.

"There are so many reasons that if I were to give them all I

should have to write at great length. I will tell you just two or three of them" (ch. XXIII):

– delicacy towards Our Lord;
– to keep the devil from tempting us easily;
– certainty of reaching the fountain of living water.

* * *

First, it would be indelicate to take back a thing we have once given Our Lord; that is, the time we have decided to devote to prayer. Individuals must "give it to Him freely . . . entirely resolved never to take it back again, whatever we may suffer through trials, annoyances or aridities. Let me realize that this time is being lent me and is not my own, and feel that I can rightly be called to account for it if I am not prepared to devote it wholly to God." One who dispenses himself easily from prayer or who, although going to it, does not try to make it well, but yields to distractions, really takes back the time given to Our Lord.

And again we must remember that Teresa wrote for all, people in the world as well as for her daughters; thus she here wished to stimulate the former to prayer as much as she could.

"A second reason why we should be resolute is that this will give the devil less opportunity to tempt us." The devil, when he sees a person resolved to go on, does not dare to attack, while he readily tempts a timorous, uncertain person. He acts like a dog who does not molest a calm, determined person but choses instead to torment a timorous person. "He is very much afraid of resolute souls . . ." There is no need to fear the devil: he "is a great coward and dares not attack the wary, but, if he sees we are careless, will work us great harm . . . This I know very well by experience . . . I am sure that none of us realize its great importance."

The third reason is that, by preservering, one will reach the fountain. When a soul is resolved to remain faithful to prayer, he is more apt to make it well; he is like the soldier who fights with great courage because he knows he has to conquer or else die in his enemies' hands.

In conclusion Saint Teresa reminded her readers to be serenely confident along with their firmness. "We must also be convinced from the start that, if we do not allow ourselves to be beaten, we shall get what we want, and there is no doubt that, however small our gains may be, they will make us very rich. Do not be afraid that the Lord Who has called us to drink of

this spring will allow you to die of thirst. This I have already said and I should like to repeat it; (we need confidence,) for people are often timid when they have not learned by experience of Our Lord's goodness . . . even though they know of it by faith. It is a great thing to have experienced what friendship and joy He gives to those who walk on this road and how He takes almost the whole cost of it upon Himself."

IV

VARIOUS ASPECTS OF PRAYER

Saint Teresa insisted on two premises before commenting on the *Pater noster.* The first was a firm resolution to persevere in prayer (chs. XX, XXI and XXIII). The second, which we shall now discuss, is the correct notion of mental prayer (chs. XXII, XXIV and XXV).

There are two ways to show what a thing is. One is to define its character; this method the Saint adopted in ch. VIII of her *Life* where she defined mental prayer: "In my view it is nothing but friendly conversation, in solitude, with Him Who, we know, loves us." In another classical text she said that in prayer "the important thing is not to think much, but to love much,"[1] —it should be a colloquy with God. From these quotations we can conclude that prayer is principally affective, although reflection can not be excluded, since knowledge is the guide and spur of love, generating in man the conviction that God loves him.

But, besides definition, there is another method of showing what a thing is, namely, to compare it with things that are similar but not exactly like it. This is what Teresa did in the chapters we are considering. She compared mental prayer with vocal prayer (chs. XXII and part of ch. XXIV) and with contemplation (ch. XXV), showing their differences. Then she finished chapter XXV by summarizing the various elements she had pointed out: "You will now understand how different (contemplation) is from mental prayer, which I have already described, and which consists in thinking of what we are saying, understanding it, and realizing Whom we are addressing, and who we are that are daring to address so great a Lord. To think of this and other similar things, such as how little we have served Him and how great is our obligation to serve Him, is mental prayer. Do not think of it as one more thing with an outlandish name and do not let the name frighten you. To recite the *Pater noster* and the *Ave Maria,* or any other petition you like, is vocal prayer. But think what discord this would make without the accompaniment of mental prayer."

[1] St. Teresa of Jesus, *IVth Mansions,* I, 7.

MENTAL PRAYER

St. Teresa desired to stress certain arguments against those who are inclined to say that mental prayer is unneccessary and that vocal prayer suffices. She was convinced that vocal prayer, although it is not mental prayer, needs mental prayer joined to it if it is to be made well.

"You must know, daughters, that there is no need to keep our lips closed in order to pray mentally" (ch. XXII). One may speak during mental prayer also, if, during the recital of vocal prayers, his mind is totally occupied with God, with the general intention of praising Him, rather than with the meaning of the words pronounced. "If, while I am speaking with God and praying vocally, I have a clear realization and full consciousness that I am doing so, and if this is more real to me than the words I am uttering, then I am combining mental and vocal prayer."

If we had to visit some important personage, we would learn the proper title and form to use in speaking with him. Since prayer is conversation with God, is it not right to take the same care in speaking with Him? Even before vocal prayer we ought to do this, so that it will not be a simple moving of the lips.

"Whenever I remember to do so, I shall always speak of mental and vocal prayer together, daughters . . . Who can say that it is wrong if, before we begin reciting the Hours or the Rosary, we think Whom we are going to address and who we are that are addressing Him, so that we may do so in the way we should? Yet I assure you, sisters, that if you considered these two points as you ought before saying your vocal prayers, you would spend a considerable time first in mental prayer."

Teresa advised turning one's attention to Christ. She did not intend to exclude the Trinity, but she felt that it would be easier that way to ascend to the divinity. "O Thou our Emperor! Supreme Power, Supreme Goodness, Wisdom Itself, without beginning, without end and without measure in Thy works: infinite are these and incomprehensible, a fathomless ocean of wonders, O Beauty containing within Thyself all beauties. O Very Strength! God help me! Would that I could command all the eloquence of mortals and all wisdom . . . to describe some of the many things on which we may meditate in order to learn something of the nature of this our Lord and Good."

Teresa placed the divine attributes of Christ at this point in

order to attract us to Him. It is true we cannot rise to her heights through a simple meditation; yet these are the same attributes taught us by the catechism and proposed to us as themes for meditation. We may not know them so profoundly, but we ought at least to be conscious that we are before God Who is infinite power, wisdom and goodness. "When you approach God, try to think and realize Whom you are about to address and continue to do so while you are addressing Him."

This is the way to begin: a sincere effort to realize that we are in the presence of a great and good God. If mental prayer consists in becoming aware of Him who is God, it is fitting that we apply ourselves to thinking of Him. To aid us Teresa stresses His divine beauty and grandeur.

VOCAL PRAYER

In Chapter XXIV St. Teresa expands the notion of mental prayer, this time by teaching how to make vocal prayer well. (Here is it evident that even if St. Teresa was writing to her daughters, she still had not forgotten the needs of other souls, for she said: "Let us now return to speak of those souls I have mentioned who cannot practice recollection or tie down their minds to mental prayer or make a meditation . . . In case any such person should come to this house—for, as I have said, not all are led by the same path—I want to advise you . . .")

To pray well vocally we should understand what we recite, especially brief, basic prayers like the Our Father, Hail Mary and Creed. Not that every time we recite these prayers we must think of the words we say, but we should adopt a suitable attitude of mind, realizing to Whom we turn in these prayers. Or we can have one point upon which to fix our attention; for example, in the Pater, the phrase "Thy will be done" appeals to one who wishes to live in abandonment; in the Hail Mary the words "Mother of God" will be welcome to one who loves to recall that everything comes to us through Our Lady's divine Maternity; during the Creed, we could recall that it is a profession of faith, or, like St. Teresa, rejoice at the words "whose kingdom shall have no end" at Mass.

"I will not discuss long prayers, but simply those which, as Christians, we are bound to recite—namely, the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria* . . . When I say the Creed, it seems to me right that I should understand and know what it is that I believe; and, when I repeat the "Our Father", my love should make me

want to understand Who this Father of ours is and Who the Master is that taught us this prayer." Since prayer is a conversation, it is not enough just to understand what we say; we must also be occupied with the one to whom we are speaking.

"It would be very wrong for us to forget even our human teachers, especially if they are holy men and our spiritual guides: we could not do so if we were faithful pupils. We should have great love and respect for them and often speak of them. And when it comes to the Master Who taught us this prayer, and Who loves us so much and is so anxious for us to profit by it, may God forbid that we should fail to think of Him often when we repeat it, although our own weakness may prevent us from doing so every time."

Here Teresa's common sense caused her to foresee days of ill-health and fatigue, when one cannot concentrate. But "the very suffering of anyone in this state will show her that she is not to blame," and God will see the good will. "She must not worry, for that only makes matters worse, nor must she weary herself by trying to put sense into . . . her mind . . . She should pray as best she can."

"What we can do ourselves is to try to be alone—and God grant that this may suffice, as I say, to make us realize in Whose presence we are and how He answers our petitions." To pray well we should place ourselves in favorable circumstances, above all in solitude, not only exterior, but especially interior, in order not to be distracted by any other thought and be able to think of God alone. Jesus recommended, "When thou art praying, go into thy inner room and shut the door upon thyself, and so pray to thy Father" (Matt. VI, 5). This is figurative language used to make us understand that, to speak to our heavenly Father, we ought to be recollected.

"Do you suppose that, because we cannot hear Him, He is silent?" God does not make His voice heard, but answers by sending grace, light, stimulus to go to Him with more decision. "He speaks to our hearts when our hearts speak to Him."

"It would be a good idea for us to imagine that He teaches this prayer to each one of us individually. This Master is never so far away that His scholars need to raise their voices to make Him hear: He is always right at their side. I want to show you that to say the *Pater Noster* well you must not leave the side of the Tutor Who teaches it to you."

Whoever prays vocally in this way is already making mental

prayer: "You will say that this is meditation, and that you are not capable of it, and do not even wish to practice it, but are content with vocal prayer." But how can we make vocal prayer well in any other way? "There are important people who dislike giving themselves trouble, and it is troublesome at first to practise recollection of the mind when one has not made it a habit. So, in order not to make themselves the least bit tired, they say they are incapable of anything but vocal prayer and do not know how to do anything further."

Yet this effort is necessary to fulfill "the obligation we are under of trying to pray attentively . . . Have patience, then, and try to make this necessary practice into a habit."

CONTEMPLATION

With Chapter XXV Saint Teresa finished her explanation of the nature of mental prayer; here she compared it with contemplation. First, however, she repeated the necessity of uniting mental prayer with vocal prayer and showed how it can help persons who do experience difficulty in meditating.

"To prove to you that vocal prayer, made perfectly, brings with it no small profit, I may tell you that it is quite possible, while you are reciting the *Pater Noster* or some other prayer, that God may raise you to perfect contemplation." God speaks to the heart, she had just said, when the heart speaks to Him—and this answer of God is contemplation.

This is a comfort for the many persons who cannot manage to meditate. To put one's whole heart into his vocal prayer is all that is necessary to reach contemplation, if it pleases God to grant it. We have an example in St. Thérèse. Meditation was not easy for her: she often helped herself with a book or with vocal prayers recited slowly; she did all she could despite the difficulties she experienced, and it was in the midst of these difficulties that God enlightened her. His visits were moments of contemplation, though not a contemplation as sublime as that of which St. Teresa spoke. She referred to perfect unitive contemplation, which belongs to persons who have reached perfection.

In this state the individual is absorbed in God, Who gives him a knowledge which is no longer conceptual, but experimental. The divine action, by inflaming the will, enkindles a new light in the intellect and produces a very sublime type of contemplation. St. John of the Cross, in his *Canticle,* gave the

following explanation: "Since this touch of God gives intense satisfaction and enjoyment to the substance of the soul, and gently fulfills her desire for this union . . . this most subtle and delicate knowledge penetrates with wonderful savoriness into the innermost part of the substance of the soul, and the delight is greater than all others. The reason for the delight is that the already understood substance, stripped of accidents and phantasms, is bestowed. For this knowledge is given to that intellect which philosophers call the passive or possible intellect, and the intellect receives it passively without any efforts of its own. This knowing is the soul's main delight because it is pertinent to the intellect, and, as theologians say, fruition, the vision of God, is proper to the intellect."[2]

St. Teresa discussed unitive contemplation at length throughout her works, especially in chapter XVIII of the *Life* and in the Vth and VIth Mansions of the *Interior Castle.* But here she merely touched upon it: "Such a person understands that, without any sound of words, she is being taught by this Divine Master, Who is suspending her faculties, which, if they were to work, would be causing her harm rather than profit" (ch. XXV).

We must bear in mind that, until God gives contemplation, we should not try to force ourselves into it; instead we should prepare ourselves by recollection, meditation, and remaining in God's presence with a simple loving attention. When God attracts the soul, and causes it enjoyment by quieting all its faculties, then it should receive the gift with simplicity and remain quiet. "The faculties rejoice without knowing how they rejoice." At this point the intellect ceases to reflect and instead rests in God's presence.

Since it is by reasoning that we understand, when the reason does not function, we do not understand; instead, we know by experience. "It is an understanding which does not understand," Teresa wrote, and the expression was so correct that St. John of the Cross adopted it himself.[3] The person feels that he is united to God, but cannot express how because he cannot form ideas.

"The soul is enkindled in love without understanding how it loves; it knows that it is rejoicing in the object of its love, yet it does not know how it is rejoicing in it."

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[2] St. John of the Cross, *Canticle,* XIV, 14.

"It is well aware that this is not a joy which can be attained by the understanding; the will embraces it, without understanding how."

When these moments are over, the intellect recalls what has happened and is convinced that it has tasted God Himself: "In so far as it can understand anything, it perceives that this is a blessing which could not be gained by the merits of all the trials suffered on earth put together. It is a gift of the Lord of earth and heaven, Who gives it like the God He is. This, daughters, is perfect contemplation" (ch. XXV).

Thus, even persons who cannot read can reach contemplation. God in His love takes them and brings them there. And this means perfect (experimental) contemplation, for as we have said, Teresa always meant this when setting contemplation as a goal for her children.

* * *

At this point Teresa discussed all three ideas—contemplation, mental prayer and vocal prayer—together.

Mental prayer "consists in thinking of what we are saying, understanding it, and realizing Whom we are addressing, and who we are that are daring to address so great a Lord." For example, in reciting the Our Father, let us see what we can learn by considering just one word, "Father". Who cannot pause here and think: then I *am* His child? And who am I? Nothing but misery by myself, and yet my soul is beautiful by what it has received from Him. He has clothed our poverty in His grace; here is the supernatural reality described so well by St. John of the Cross in the *Spiritual Canticle.*[4] All the mystery of grace is contained here. And grace is the gift of Him Who is love.

Now we understand by reason alone that God loves His crea-

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[3] St. Teresa of Jesus, *Life,* XVIII, 14. St. John of the Cross, *Canticle,* XXXVIII, 9. The Saint means that it is an understanding unlike our ordinary and connatural understandng: the latter is "conceptual", i.e. it proceeds with distinct ideas which come from the senses; the former proceeds from another source: the experience of the will, and therefore is not conceptual.

The prayer of union opens wide for the soul the door of a new world which, in the prayer of quiet, was scarcely half-open. Now it will see itself gradually immersed more and more until it loses itself there altogether.

[4] Cf. St. John of the Cross, *Canticle,* XXXII.

ture. But to gain a really deep knowledge of this truth, we need faith also. When we know a thing by reasoning we cling to it only with the intellect; but the whole soul, intellect and will, takes part in knowing by faith and is completely captivated by the truths known. Faith's knowledge belongs to the intellect, but is acquired under the impulse of the will.

Thus, for example, as we consider the word "Father", faith will inspire great trust in Him. If we avoid the useless reasonings we are so prone to—which make the soul unhappy and tense and do not actually give it security—and rest on our faith in God's love for us, we shall advance. Even in the most painful circumstances we will be certain of being united to God, of becoming transformed into Him by love. The cross is the instrument of detachment and, therefore, of sanctity.

In conclusion, we note with St. Teresa that "in these two kinds of prayer (vocal and mental), with God's help we may accomplish something ourselves" and ought to do so, but in contemplation "we can do nothing"—all depends on God and to try to procure it for ourselves is ridiculous. Our part is to prepare for it by application to vocal and mental prayer; then, if God "takes the words out of our mouth", we shall be listening.

Part IV

The Life of Perfection

based on

St. Teresa's Commentary

on the

Our Father

I

MEDITATION

"Our Father"

From chapter twenty-six to the end of the book, St. Teresa showed how mental prayer can be practiced so that it gradually becomes contemplative. She based herself on a vocal prayer, the *Pater Noster,* and through it showed how to enter into the heart of prayer.

In preparation, to recall the presence of God, she indicated Jesus as the Master teaching us the *Pater.* Then she travelled the whole road of prayer from beginning to end by considering the petitions one by one.

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

The first thing is to recall God's presence, and this may be done in various ways. The Saint gave one—for the person who cannot meditate by reflecting on the points in a book and has to use a vocal prayer instead. But from this one way we can draw the general principles and apply them to all the other ways.

"You know that, first of all, you must examine your conscience, say the *Confiteor* and make the sign of the Cross." She was alluding to the practice then in use in all monasteries, and it is one way of beginning. Nowadays we usually begin prayer with the "Come, Holy Spirit . . .", which fills the same purpose by requesting help.

"Then, as you are alone, you must look for a companion—and who could be a better Companion than the very Master Who taught you the prayer that you are about to say? Imagine that this Lord Himself is at your side and see how lovingly, how humbly He is teaching you." Even if we spent the whole time of prayer just gazing on the adorable Person of Our Lord, we would make excellent prayer.

"Believe me, you should stay with so good a Friend for as long as you can before you leave Him. If you accustom yourselves to keep Him near you, and He sees that you love to have Him and are always trying to please Him, you will never be able to send Him away, nor will He ever fail you. He will help you in all your trials and you will have Him everywhere. Do you

think it is a small thing to have such a Friend at your side?" (ch. XXVI). St. Teresa was referring to that presence which we ought to cultivate, not only during prayer, but also during the day. If we form this habit, we shall find it easy to intensify its acts on beginning prayer.

"O sisters, those of you whose minds cannot reason for long or whose thought cannot dwell upon God but are constantly wandering, must at all costs form this habit. I know quite well that you are capable of it." The Saint delighted in saying that on the way to union with God there are many things we can do ourselves.

St. Thérèse, speaking of her conversion on Christmas night, said that in a moment God worked in her what she had not succeeded in doing in many years, despite all the efforts of her constant good will.

"For many years I endured this trial of being unable to concentrate on one subject, and a very sore trial it is. But I know Our Lord does not leave us so devoid of help that if we approach Him humbly and ask Him to be with us He will not grant our request. If a whole year passes without our obtaining what we ask, let us be prepared to try for longer. Let us never grudge time so well spent. Who, after all, is hurrying us? I am sure we can form this habit and strive to walk at the side of this true Master."

Teresa's reason for establishing direct contact with God from the very beginning of prayer followed from her notion of prayer: a friendly conversation. To speak intimately with a person, one has to have him near. Many souls waste time in prayer because they are careless about this initial contact. Distractions may come afterwards, but one will get back to recollection more easily because of this beginning.

If we call upon God it is to occupy ourselves with Him, so we need to look at Him; we are free to use any mystery we like. Here the Saint has some beautiful pages which reveal her own method a little. "If you feel happy, think of Him at His resurrection, for the very thought of how He rose from the tomb will delight you. How bright and beautiful was He then! How majestic! How victorious! How joyful! . . ." "If you are suffering trials, or are sad, watch Him on His way to the garden. What grief must have arisen in His soul to cause Him, Who was patience itself, to manifest it and to complain of it! . . . See Him, bound to the column, full of pain, His flesh all torn

to pieces by His great love for you. How much He suffered! . . . Or look upon Him bending under the weight of the Cross and not even allowed to take breath: He will look upon you with those beautiful, compassionate eyes, brimming with tears, and will forget His own grief to solace yours, only because you went to comfort Him and turned towards Him."

There is no question of reflection as in meditation. It suffices to think of Jesus in some mystery, looking at Him: "O Prince of all the world, my true Spouse!" you may say to Him, if your heart has been so melted at seeing Him in this state that not only do you look at Him, but feel delight in speaking to Him (not in any fixed form of prayer, but out of your compassion, which means so much to Him..) 'Art Thou so needy, my Lord and my Good, that Thou wilt accept poor companionship like mine? Do I read in Thy face that Thou hast found comfort, even in me?' " This contact with God is the essence of prayer, and we can reach it right from the beginning.

Of course, effort is necessary: "You will ask me, sisters, how you can possibly do all this, and say that, if you had seen His Majesty with your bodily eyes at the time when He lived in the world, you would have done it willingly and gazed at Him for ever. Do not believe it: if you will not use a little self-constraint now, in order to recollect yourselves and to picture Our Lord in your mind (which may be done without danger and solely by a slight effort), much less would you have stood at the foot of the cross with the Magdalen, who looked death straight in the face."

This doctrine can be applied to other ways of recalling the presence of God, for we are free to use any we may wish: thinking of Jesus in the Eucharist, of the Blessed Trinity, or of one of the Divine Persons. Or we can recall that God is present in us—in His immensity, His power and His essence: He is our Creator. Again we can remember our dependence on Him—Teresa herself loved to do this. Or we can remind ourselves that the Blessed Trinity is dwelling in us in order to be known, loved and in a certain manner enjoyed, even beginning during this life. It is worth a little effort to realize this divine presence, whatever be the degree of prayer we have reached!

For those moment when circumstances cause us to come to prayer somewhat distracted, Teresa suggested ways of returning gently to the presence of God: "You will find it very helpful if you can get an image or a picture of Our Lord—one that you

like, not to wear round your neck and never look at, but to use often when you talk to Him, and He will tell you what to say." As a good illustration of this, we need only recall how St. Thérèse used the image of the Holy Face to overcome her many difficulties in prayer. "It is also a great help to have a good book, written in the vernacular" which speaks of God.

One who begins prayer dynamically, by coming into God's presence, will readily learn what intimate contact with Him is. "If you are careful to form these habits . . . you will derive such great profit from them that I could not describe it."

FIRST DEGREE OF PRAYER

In chapter twenty-seven Teresa wrote about the first degree of prayer, which is meditation. She did so, keeping before her the image of one who cannot follow the "classical manner" of meditating.

Let us suppose that this person has prepared himself by recalling God's presence. Since he cannot delve into a mystery and draw out practical lessons as he finds it in a meditation book, he begins his vocal prayer by saying: *Our Father who art in heaven.* Since the Saint expected mental prayer to be united to vocal, these first words of the *Pater Noster* give him occasion for an affectionate conversation with God. There are only two parts to this meditation suggested by the Saint:

1) the loving colloquy, fired by the thought of God's love for us and a desire to love Him in return;

2) practical application to our life.

LOVING CONVERSATION WITH GOD

The words *Our Father Who art in heaven* made Teresa exclaim: "O my Lord, how Thou dost reveal Thyself as the Father of such a Son, while Thy Son reveals Himself as the Son of such a Father! Blessed be Thou for ever and ever. Ought not so great a favor as this, Lord, to have come at the end of the prayer? Here, at the very beginning, Thou dost fill our hands and grant us so great a favor that it would be well if the understanding could be filled with it so as to preoccupy the will and to make us unable to say another word." She was trying her best to make us realize God's love and pray with childlike trust, considering Him, not as Creator and supreme Ruler, but as our Father who loves and cares for us.

So great a truth would be enough to captivate a soul and

place it in contemplation. "Oh, how appropriate, daughters, would perfect contemplation be here! Oh, how right would the soul be to enter within itself, the better to rise above self, so that this holy Son might teach it what the 'heaven' is like in which He says His Father dwells!" However, the Saint did not yet speak of contemplation because she first had to explain the lower grades of prayer wherein the soul has to work for itself.

She began to converse with Jesus Who makes us say, like Himself, *Our Father.* Like Him we are sons of God: He by nature, we by adoption; but we do belong to the divine Family. "O Son of God and Lord of mine! Why dost Thou give us so much with Thy very first word? Besides humbling Thyself to the dust by joining Thy petitions to our own, and by making Thyself the Brother of such miserable wretches as ourselves, Thou dost give us, in Thy Father's name, all that can be given—Thou dost ask Him to make us His children, and Thy word cannot fail. Thus Thou dost bind Him to fulfill Thy word, a charge by no means light, since, being our Father, He must bear with us, however great our offences. If we return to Him, He must pardon us, as He pardoned the prodigal son, must comfort us in our trials, and maintain us in a way that becomes Him Who must needs be better than any earthly father, since all His attributes must be supreme in their perfection. More than this, He must make us brethren and co-heirs with Thee!"

As one can meditate on the Passion—for example Jesus at the column—to move oneself to love Him, so here the recital of the *Our Father* serves as spur to reflection. It is simply a different approach at a better grasp of God's great love for us with a consequent deepening of our love for Him.

"Thy love for us, O Lord, and Thy humility, remove all obstacles: besides, Thy having lived on earth, clothed with a mortal body, offers some reason for Thy caring for us, seeing that Thou dost share our nature. But remember that, as Thou has told us, Thy Father dwells in heaven; therefore Thou shouldst guard His honor . . . O good Jesus! How clearly hast Thou shown that Thou art One with Him and that Thy will is His and His is Thine! . . . What is this love Thou hast for us?"

RESOLUTIONS

Every good meditation should have a practical side also. Therefore, in the second part of this chapter the Saint suggested

some resolutions for those just entering upon a life of prayer.

"Do you not think it would be well for us to efface from our minds the meaning of this prayer while we say it with our lips, lest our hearts should be rent in pieces at the very idea of such a love?" And so the first resolution: to seek to know God's lovableness better and better. "What son is there in the world who would not try to learn who his father was if he had one as good, as princely and as powerful, as ours?"

The second resolution is more general: "You have a good Father, given you by the good Jesus: let no other father be known here through any word of yours. Strive, daughters, to merit God's caresses; cast yourselves into His arms." This is simply to recall the ideal of intimacy with God, *together with* the life of generosity which should prepare one for reaching it. "You know that He will never send you away while you remain dutiful children. And who would not do anything rather than lose such a Father?"

Thus we have a real meditation, a meditation that is within everyone's power. Who can say he is unable to recite the Our Father and think of the meaning of the words? And how can one aware of this great love fail to make generous resolutions? Recollection during the day will come more easily, because a genuine loving conversation with God in prayer can only intensify one's awareness of God's presence.

St. Teresa ended this section with a reflection on the Trinity which is interesting because she had not yet had that Trinitarian experience which she would enjoy ten years later: "However much your thoughts may wander, between such a Son and such a Father the Holy Spirit must perforce be found. May He enkindle your will and bind you to Himself with the most fervent love, since even your own great gain suffices not to urge you to it."

II

THE PRAYER OF RECOLLECTION

"Who art in heaven"

With chapter twenty-eight Teresa began speaking of another form of prayer which, in a wide sense, can be called a second step, because in it recollection is more intense than in ordinary prayer and yet it does begin a new phase in the growth of prayer.[1]

SECOND DEGREE OF PRAYER

Although St. Teresa described it, we can comprehend the prayer of recollection easier by saying that it is, quite simply, the realization of the presence of God in us. This means an *active* realization (not the passive one which belongs to infused prayer of which St. Teresa wrote at length in chapter III of the IVth Mansions of the *Interior Castle*), an active realization obtained as the result of the combined effort of the mind and will enlightened by faith. Thus it does have something in common with the preceding degree which—as we have seen—begins with an act of the presence of God; but here there is a realization of God within us. This is to become the major occupation of the soul. Later, one can apply himself to other forms of prayer, whether vocal or meditative.

However, since the senses, the imagination and the intellect are like many windows open on the external world through which we easily go out and get lost, a person who wishes to remain in God's company within himself must apply these powers to an interior object: God. He, as an object of knowledge is always within us although we are unaware of it. He can make Himself felt, but that depends upon Him.

How can we relate ourselves to this interior object? The answer: through the gaze of faith.

I do not say that a philosopher, learned in metaphysics, cannot make himself conscious of the presence of God within us, but few have his capacity to grasp by reason alone that, since

[1] Teresa spoke of the prayer of recollection in chapters XXVIII and XXIX: first, of its nature and advantages; then, of the way to obtain it. The first three paragraphs of ch. XXIX are a digression on an exercise of humility.

the Creator is immense and all-powerful, He is in all creatures. And so God *revealed* his presence of immensity (as it is called); consequently, all can know it by faith.

Faith speaks of another presence of God in the soul which reason alone could not discover: the presence of the Blessed Trinity through grace. Unlike the presence of immensity, this is not simply a presence of activity—the activity of preserving us in existence; it is rather a presence of *living together,* wherein God shares His life with us. Through sanctifying grace God comes to dwell in the soul as in His temple, and it can place itself in vital contact with Him by knowledge and love. God offers Himself to us to be known, loved, and enjoyed, even on earth.

However, man's enjoyment of God is passive—he cannot procure it by himself—because it stems from the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Yet every man in the state of grace possesses these gifts, and, consequently possesses also the immediate possibility of enjoying God.

One may say, then, that God offers Himself to man to be enjoyed when *He* wills, but to be known and loved when *we* will, because the theological virtues suffice for this. For a loving, filial contact faith suffices. Faith is true but obscure knowledge, wrote St. John of the Cross.

The essence of the prayer of recollection is an intense exercise of the theological virtues.

Man's soul is a little heaven in which he can enclose himself to live with God. Retiring from creatures, he seeks the Trinity, and his "eye of faith" finds It. And after he has been faithful to this for a while, Teresa insisted, he finds that he can converse familiarly with God, that he can look at Him and speak to Him, not necessarily in words—though these will often come. Man's wordless love is enough, and God will answer with His lights. True, he does not perceive the divine action; but it is nonetheless real. There is no new interior experience, but God is at the gates.

Consequently man should calm his faculties, withdraw his senses from external things, and concentrate on God present in him.

"Those who practise this prayer almost always keep their eyes shut during it. This is an admirable custom for many reasons, because one thus forcibly prevents oneself from looking at earthly things. This restraint is only required when one first begins

to practise this prayer: later on, a strong effort would be needed to open the eyes" (ch. XXVIII). Even the imagination keeps quiet, so that the intellect can apply itself more easily to God, and the recollection is thus intensified. This form of prayer habituates us little by little to remain in God's company.

Once we have realized God's presence in us, a life of union with Him begins, because this is not just an *act* for beginning prayer, as it was in the preceding stage; it is the substance of this prayer. It becomes easier to sustain a vital awareness throughout the day, and not just at prayer time.

And at prayer itself, after renewing this intimate contact with God, one can continue his prayer in any form: either prolonging the look of simple love, or reciting vocal prayers in the way St. Teresa has taught, or continuing his loving colloquy, or making a true and proper meditation—for example, on the Passion—with Jesus Who is there, in his inmost soul.

The prayer of recollection can be combined with any form of prayer.

ADVANTAGES

Teresa noted that there are many grades of recollection: it can be more or less intense, according to one's efforts. Not that its intensity depends entirely on us—for our psychological condition does affect it—but its advantages depend upon its intensity.

The Saint indicated three of these benefits:

1) *Man acquires a certain dominion over his senses.* His effort to calm them and keep them from following their impressions makes him, to some degree, master of them. Now he can pacify them, not only in general, during the day, but especially during the time of prayer. It is important not to allow oneself to be distracted by what occurs about him, St. John of the Cross recommends.[2] There will always be some activity in the intellect,

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[2] Cf. St. John of the Cross, third *Caution:* ". . . Keep thyself with all diligence from setting thy thoughts upon what happens in the community, and still more from speaking of it. . . If thou desirest to consider any of these things, even though thou live among angels, many of them will seem to thee to be amiss, since thou wilt not understand the reason for them.

God wills thee to . . . keep thy soul pure and sincere with Him, without allowing the thought of this or that to distract three. . . If thou do not this . . . thou canst not . . . attain holy detachment and recollection."

he said,[3] and from time to time the imagination will distract it, but if one has begun well it becomes easier to return to recollection.

2) *The love of God is enflamed more easily* in a man who is recollected because he is more vividly aware of God's presence.

3) *The prayer of recollection disposes man for infused prayer.* His transit to infused prayer may happen without his conscious awareness of it. A man who is actively recollected attracts God to himself, and thus the prayer of recollection provides the best preparation for the prayer of quiet. St. Teresa often mentioned this preparation for infused prayer, and even spoke of its relationship to perfect contemplation: "After they have entered the soul many times (i.e. the senses have been recalled by the will to recollection), Our Lord is pleased that they should settle entirely in perfect contemplation."

HELPFUL PRACTICES

St. Teresa suggested three practices which can help us acquire this prayer of active recollection. The first two pertain to the beginning of prayer, and the third is for the remainder of the day to facilitate recollection.

Prayer consists in acts of knowledge and love. Although love effects union, it must be guided by knowledge: before I can love God I have to know that He exists. So the first of these three practices is for the intellect: a practical way of realizing God's presence in us. In another manner of speaking we can say that it is a realization of our interior wealth, for St. Teresa spoke of this divine presence in relation to the grace and virtues we possess and which should be cultivated in order to increase union with God.

"Now let us imagine that we have within us a most splendid palace, built entirely of gold and precious stones—in short, one that is fit for so great a Lord—and that we are partly responsible for the condition of this building, because there is no structure

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[3] St. John of the Cross, *Ascent,* II, XII, 8: "To such as these the advice must be given to learn to abide attentively and wait lovingly upon God in that state of quiet, and to pay no heed to imagination or its working. . ."

XIII, 3: ". . . I do not mean that the imagination does not come and go (for it is wont to move freely even at times of great recollection), but that the soul has no pleasure in fixing itself of set purpose upon other objects."

so beautiful as a soul filled with virtues, and the more perfect these virtues are the more brilliantly do the jewels shine. Within this palace dwells the mighty King Who has designed to become your Father, and Who is seated upon a throne of supreme price—by which I mean your heart."

"Do not let us suppose that the interior of the soul is empty"; we have within us riches which she deplored not having known for many years, due to ignorance. "God grant," she added, "that only women may be so thoughtless as to suppose that." Here she evidently alluded to an incident recounted in her *Life*: she asked a certain theologian about this presence of God is us, and he was unable to answer her.

She spoke of the presence of God in us along with the retinue of virtues which accompany grace. The palace can always be made more magnificent because we can develop this wealth deposited in the soul by Baptism. In a certain sense, we can say that the Blessed Trinity grows ever nearer to us, because, as virtue increases in the soul, we are ever more prepared to enter into dynamic contact with God.

But this first practice, aimed at the intellect, is inadequate to attain intimate union with God.

At this point we find that famous maxim: "As Christ does not force our will, He only takes what we give Him, but He does not give Himself entirely until we give ourselves entirely to Him." This expresses the essence of Teresian spirituality: man must open his whole soul and let it be invaded by the divine will.

Expressive of this is St. Thérèse's act of oblation: "Dear Lord, I wish to be the prey of Your love", of Your will; that is, to be always pleased with what you do and at the same time try to always please you. Her abandon is anything but passivity; it is active adherence to God's will. A good way to pray when one has difficulty in meditating is to recite this act of oblation to merciful Love slowly.

God "does not work within the soul to the same extent when it is not wholly given to Him . . . He likes everything to be done in order" (ch. XXVIII).

When God unites man to Himself He expands him so that he can enter spiritually into an immense depth, but this depends upon his giving God his whole will. He seeks man's permission; man has to open the gate so that God can enter and attract the soul to Himself.

If God is in the soul as in a heaven, said the Saint return-

ing to those words of the *Pater noster* upon which she was commenting ("Who art in heaven"), the saints who form His court will also be with Him in some manner.

Actually they are present only insofar as they know and see in God what we do in their honor. Teresa noted that their presence does not impede our solitude with Him, nor will it do so in heaven. Man will always be a great solitary, insofar as the substantial beatitude of the solitary life is concerned. The secrets uttered to the soul in the beatific vision are incommunicable.

The two great instruments by which man procures the prayer of recollection, therefore, are his realization of his inner wealth by awareness of God's presence and then his gift of his whole self to God.

The third practice which prepares man for the prayer of recollection is his practice of the presence of God throughout the day. Many methods of doing this are possible, for example, the use of an external object, a mental recalling of God's presence of immensity or that of indwelling.[4]

"To conclude, I advise whoever wishes to acquire this habit (which, as I said, we have the power to gain) not to grow tired of persevering in trying gradually to obtain the mastery over herself. This self-denial will profit any nun by making her senses serve her soul" (end of ch. XXIX). During the day, "if she is speaking, she must try to remember that there is One within her to Whom she can speak; if she is listening, let her remember that she can listen to Him Who is nearer to her than anyone else. In short, let her be convinced that she may, if she likes, ever keep this holy companionship, and let her grieve when she has left her Father alone for any length of time, though she has such need of Him. If she can, let her recollect herself often during the day in this way; if not, at least let her practise it occasionally. As she grows accustomed to it, she will feel its benefits, sooner or later; once God has granted her this grace, she would not exchange it for any treasure."

"Nothing can be learned without a certain amount of trouble. For the love of God, sisters, reckon your time well spent in acquiring this habit. I know that, with His help, if you practise it for a year, or perhaps for only six months, you will gain it. Think what a short time that is for so great an advantage as lay-

[4] Cf. Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, *Little Catechism of Prayer*, VI.

ing this firm foundation, so that if Our Lord wishes to raise you to a high degree of prayer, He will find you prepared for it, since you keep close to Him. May His Majesty never allow us to withdraw from His presence."

III

THE PRAYER OF QUIET

"Hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come"

Teresa dedicated the next two chapters to the prayer of quiet, a supernatural prayer, which one cannot procure for himself. God Himself, she noted, united the two petitions: *Hallowed be Thy name* and *Thy kingdom come* because He knows "that, unless He enabled us to do so by giving us His kingdom (the prayer of quiet) here on earth, our natural defects would render us unfit to hallow . . . the holy name of the eternal Father" (ch. XXX), for one cannot praise God perfectly unless one loves Him greatly.

THIRD DEGREE OF PRAYER

This is the second time the Saint raises our thoughts to heaven; the first time she was commenting on the words *Who art in heaven*; now her purpose is to show that, in the prayer of quiet, we foretaste something of what we shall have in Paradise. Her thought rose easily to commerce among the Blessed; when it returned to this mortal life it yearned to have all men live in praise of God.

Let us recall the pages of the *Interior Castle* of St. Teresa[1] and those of the Spiritual Canticle of St. John of the Cross[2] which, explaining fruitive prayer, speak of a sense of exaltation stemming from one's experience of God's goodness. At this point, however, we are not yet speaking of such a lofty development of prayer. Yet when one has tasted God's love, one knows Him better and praises Him more. The heart enamored of God spontaneously renders Him honor and glory, because it knows His lovableness and has experienced His sweetness.

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[1] St. Teresa of Jesus, *VIth Mansions*, chap. VI: "I think the position is that the faculties are in close union, but that Our Lord leaves both faculties and senses free to enjoy this happiness, without understanding what it is that they are enjoying and how they are enjoying it. . . The joy of the soul is so exceedingly great that it would like, not to rejoice in God in solitude, but to tell its joy to all, so that they may help it praise Our Lord. . . This must have been the state of mind of St. Francis, when robbers met him as he was going about the countryside crying aloud and he told them that he was the herald of the great King."

"Among the many other joys, the principal happiness of heaven seems to me to consist in a disregard of all earthly things, and in a peace and glory that dwell in a soul which rejoices in the bliss of its companions. It lives in perfect peace and feels supreme satisfaction in seeing that all those around it honor and praise God and bless His name, and in knowing that they never offend Him. In heaven, everyone loves Him: the soul cares for nothing but loving Him: it cannot cease to do so, because it knows Him as He is" (ch. XXX).

The more deeply one knows Him, with a knowledge that has some of the experimental in it, the more one will be drawn to praise and love Him perfectly, for contemplative knowledge has a certain affinity to the knowledge of the Blessed.

"If only we really knew Him we should do the same in this world, although not so constantly and so perfectly as in heaven, yet very differently from what we do now."

Naturally we cannot possess the kingdom of heaven yet, for that does not belong to this life; but the Saint observed that, beginning in this life, we can attain it to some degree, and it is this growing possession which the soul acquires by means of prayer and contemplation.

"You must imagine that I mean we must be angels in order to make this petition and to pray well vocally." In a certain sense this is a true desire—at least insofar as man can imitate their complete absorption in the divine praise. We seek His kingdom, not only in heaven, but also on earth.

So St. Teresa thought it legitimate to desire this more profound form of prayer which bestows an experimental knowledge of God. "You may be quite sure that He never tells us to ask for impossibilities, so it must be possible, with God's help, for a soul living in this state of exile to reach such a point, though

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[2] Cf. St. John of the Cross. *Canticle,* IX, XIV, XV. "In this divine union the soul sees and tastes abundance, inestimable riches, finds all the rest and recreation that it desires and understands strange kinds of knowledge and secrets of God, which is another of those kinds of food that it likes best. It feels likewise in God an awful power and strength which transcends all other power and strength; it tastes a marvellous sweetness and spiritual delight, finds true rest and divine light and has lofty experience of the knowledge of God, which shines forth in the harmony of the creatures and the acts of God. Likewise it feels itself to be full of good things and far withdrawn from evil things and empty of them; and, above all, it experiences, and has fruition of, an inestimable feast of love, which confirms it in love" (XIV).

not as perfectly as those who have been freed from this prison, for we are making a sea-voyage and are still on the journey. But there are times when we are wearied with travelling and Our Lord grants our faculties tranquillity and our soul quiet, and while they are in that state He gives us a clear understanding of the nature of the gifts He bestows upon those whom He brings to His kingdom."

"Souls to whom He gives in this world the 'kingdom' we ask for, receive pledges encouraging them to trust confidently that they will one day enjoy for ever that happiness which on earth He only permits them to taste."

Teresa's thought is this: Christ has united these two petitions *hallowed be Thy name* and *Thy kingdom come* to show us that we should unite them too. He wishes that we spend our whole life in praise, sustained best by some experimental knowledge of God. Thus begins a very pure degree of contemplation, wherein a man does not employ images and ideas, but proceeds by means of love with a *taste* of God.

The Saint half excused herself for speaking of it when she promised to confine herself to teaching how to make vocal prayer well. But as she did say that often God raises a soul to perfect contemplation from vocal prayer made well, and so she availed herself of the opportunity to speak of it, although vocal prayer is actually her subject here. Both go together well, she said. She cited the example of a person she knew who could do nothing save recite the *Pater*; yet she did it with such devotion that she spent whole hours on it and "though keeping to the *Our Father,* she was experiencing pure contemplation, and occasionally God raised her to perfect union with Himself."

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRAYER OF QUIET

At this point (ch. XXXI) St. Teresa wrote of her own personal experience. This state of prayer can be realized in various degrees; in this as in other matters there are no two individuals alike. But this did *not* dismay the Saint for she seems very comfortable with the idea throughout this book treating of the way of perfection.

She had already described it in her *Life* when she explained the "second manner of drawing water" and she would treat of it again when she wrote the *Interior Castle.*

Using the confidences of her spiritual daughters, St. Teresa spoke of the varieties of these graces in the light of their exper-

iences, but most of the time she spoke of her own personal experience. "Now, my daughters, I still want to describe this prayer of quiet to you, in the way I have heard it talked about, and as Our Lord has been pleased to teach it to me, perhaps in order that I might describe it to you" (ch. XXXI).

"It is in this kind of prayer, as I have said, that Our Lord seems to me to begin to show us that He is hearing our petition: He begins to give us His kingdom on earth so that we may truly praise Him and hallow His name and try to make others do the same. This is a supernatural state . . ."

What did St. Teresa mean by supernatural? Even our customary prayers are supernatural, inasmuch as they are raised to the superior order of the grace which we possess. It is not in this sense that the Saint used the word, but in a special sense, for in her thought the initiative comes from God, not from us: it is a *passive* prayer. And here again we must be careful about the meaning of the word. *Passive* does not mean *laissez faire* with no personal activity, but that we cannot procure this prayer; *we* can only dispose ourselves for it: "however hard we try, we cannot reach it for ourselves".

Behind this lies the theological fact that such prayer depends upon the action of the gifts of the Holy Spirit which do not function because of our efforts; they depend completely upon God. We can only prepare ourselves.

The prayer of quiet is the first contemplative prayer in which man perceives that it is not he alone who is working. Often God has already worked and orientated him without his perceiving it. But suddenly he becomes aware of an orientation of his life which he has not procured by himself, but which stems from a deeper spiritual experience.

"It is a state in which the soul enters into peace, or rather in which Our Lord gives it peace through His presence, as He did to that just man Simeon. Thus all the faculties are calmed, and in some manner, in no way connected with the exterior senses, the spirit realizes that it is close to its God, and that if it drew but a little nearer to Him, it would become one with Him by union." Union is really a very great intensification of the prayer of quiet.

However, even if the prayer of quiet can be explained by the intervention of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, this intervention does not sufficiently explain the prayer of fruitive union, which requires God's direct action on the will; this theologians call

a "divine substantial touch."

"This is not because such a person sees Him, either with its bodily or with its spiritual eyes," St. Teresa continued. The spiritual eyes are the imagination; the bodily, the senses, which put us into contact with exterior objects.

"The just man Simeon saw no more than the glorious Infant—a poor little Child, Who, to judge from the swaddling-clothes in which He was wrapped and from the small number of the people who He had to take Him up to the Temple, might well have been the son of these poor people rather than the Son of His heavenly Father. But the Child Himself revealed to him Who He was. Just so, though less clearly, does the soul know Who He is," that is, by a knowledge that comes, not through the senses, but from within, from that which the soul experiences. It is a knowledge through love.

Knowledge always comes from some experience, but experience is twofold:

1) from outside, through the senses, as, for example, the sight of a magnificent panorama that makes one say: "How beautiful must the One Who created it be!" And this thought arouses love.

One can also do this with the imagination. Picturing to ourselves a landscape seen at another time, we can form ideas which then inspire us with love of God.

2) interior experience. This is quite another thing.

The love of charity is a friendship, a mutual well-wishing. We desire good things for God, but He desires them much more for us and draws us to Himself. This attraction varies in intensity; at times it is so hidden that a man is unaware of it; at other times it is so strong that he feels himself the prisoner of God. This transcends the experience of the senses and of the imagination; it is the experience of love; yet it reflects upon the intelligence, not by arousing ideas, but by producing a "sense of God". Man becomes aware that this God by Whom he feels himself taken captive is so unique, so great, so superior to all things, that there is nothing comparable to Him. Here it is not a question of ideas awakening love, as in 1) above; on the contrary, the intellect receives knowledge from love.

Without some "sense of God" man cannot properly orientate himself to God. By this we do not mean that God is obliged to give this by means of the prayer of quiet. Spiritual experiences were much more discernible in St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila than St. Thérèse of Lisieux. For the latter, her

"sense of God" was very hidden, though very profound.

The soul "cannot understand how it knows Him, yet it feels sure it is in that 'kingdom', or at least, near the King from Whom the kingdom is to come, and it feels such reverence that it dares to ask nothing." There is no need for the individual to understand how this happens. The essential thing is not to understand, but to have this experimental knowledge of love.

Where is this attraction coming from God felt?

In the will; therefore, Teresa said, the will feels itself a prisoner. The other faculties too can be captivated, but often intellect and memory are free and actually weary the soul with their restless movements.

The will is so contented to be drawn by God into His embrace that it does not want to have its freedom any more. The Saint always insisted on this in speaking of the prayer of quiet. We recall St. Augustine: "You have made us for Yourself, O God, and our heart is restless until it rest in You."[3] Here man experiences a peace which diffuses itself throughout his entire being, although there may be obstacles to it from the other two powers which remain free.

Since it is held by God, the will cannot be distracted from Him, while the intellect *can* be, and if the soul follows it it will be distracted too, and will disturb the repose of the will. While the will enjoys God, the intellect notices this and seeks to intervene with its own natural work, forming ideas about what the will is enjoying, because its natural tendency is to understand; and the memory contributes its share. However, the intellect finds that it cannot adequately grasp this experience, for it defies expression. Should a man permit himself to follow this natural movement of the intellect and memory, and try to form ideas, he will quickly distract himself from the loving attention which occupies the will.

But when God draws the soul still more strongly, the effect on the intellect is so intense that it too is quieted. The stronger the attraction in the will the greater is the "sense of God" in the intellect.

ADVICE

The first piece of advice St. Teresa gave was aimed at preventing great indiscretion. There are some who, perceiving these experiences of love, fear to move or even to breathe, in order

[3] *Confessions,* Book I, Chapter I.

to prolong this sweetness. Teresa reminded them that this is a supernatural thing, which cannot be neither procured nor prolonged by human industry.

However, it is well at this time to stay in greater solitude and recollection. St. John of the Cross[4] stated that it is a crime to occupy souls attracted by solitary love in worldly affairs because solitude is *the* atmosphere for developing these graces and opening the soul to a purer and deeper love. They must try to lead a very recollected life.

Second, Teresa wrote, if in this prayer, one becomes aware the intellect is trying to grasp what is happening, he must pay no attention to the desire. If he does follow the movement of the mind and try to understand, he will become distracted.

There is only one thing a person can do and that is to remain quiet; actually, theologians speak of semi-passive prayer. In the prayer of union, the soul will be completely taken over by God and will have nothing more to do.

"If God gives a soul such pledges, it is a sign that He has great things in store for it. It will be its own fault if it does not make great progress." In order to belong wholly to Him, man must develop great generosity and detachment. The Saint—and this is the third piece of advice—insisted strongly on this. Otherwise, "if He sees that, after He has brought the Kingdom of Heaven into its abode, it returns to earth, not only will He refrain from showing it the secrets of His kingdom but He will grant it this other favor only for short periods and rarely."

CONCLUSION

This discussion has centered upon a prayer of quiet which flourishes during the time destined for prayer, but there is a second form, one which continues in the midst of daily occupations. While one attends to the external service of God in dis-

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[4] St. John of the Cross, *Canticle*, Annotation for Stanza XXIX: "Here it is to be noted that, for so long as the soul has not reached this estate of union of love, it must need practise love, both in the active life and in the contemplative; but when it reaches that estate it befits it not to be occupied in other outward acts and exercises which might keep it back, however little, from that abiding in love with God, although they may greatly conduce to the service of God; for a very little of this pure love is more precious, in the sight of God and the soul, and of greater profit to the Church, even though the soul appear to be doing nothing, than are all these works together."

charging customary business, his will can remain united to Him. In this one feels that in his occupations "the most important faculty is absent—namely, the will, which I think is united with its God—and that the other faculties are left free to busy themselves with His service. For this they have much more capacity at such a time, though when attending to worldly affairs they are dull and sometimes stupid."

These experiences are very rewarding ones: "It is a great favor which the Lord grants to these souls, for it unites the active life with the contemplative . . . . Thus Martha and Mary work together.

IV

THE GIFT OF SELF AND UNITIVE CONTEMPLATION

"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"

Chapter XXXII is one of the most important chapters in the *Way of Perfection.* Commenting on the *Pater* St. Teresa had spoken of various degrees of prayer; here she began to discuss the perfect life in relation to the highest states of prayer. This chapter completes Teresa's commentary on the first part of the *Pater noster* and the exposition of the degrees of prayer.

The first paragraphs form a bridge with previous thought and set the tonality of the entire chapter, which is the Teresian atmosphere of generosity. Next follows a treatment of the importance of offering God one's will with its twofold effect: perfect or unitive contemplation and the state of union.

Since this chapter leads the reader to the summit of prayer, we might say that it is central in the *Way.*

We are aware of St. Teresa's sense of the absolute. She did not like things done by halves; she wanted to give all and was convinced that God would help her in this, and that He would even help her do greater things.

This is man's response to all that God has done for him. God led Teresa to understand that He wished to give her His kingdom even in this life, wished to transform her into a heaven in which His perfect praise might continually resound. She recalled this gift which God offered her along with that of the divine sonship—affirmed in the first words of the *Pater noster;*—and so she wanted to offer Him something in return. Jesus, Who taught us this great prayer and says it with us, offers to the Father, as a return gift, our will. A small thing, the will of His creature, but whoever gives it completely has given everything, because, in practice, the strength of the human personality rests in the will.

At this point Teresa took to task those timid persons who dare not make this offering by saying *fiat voluntas tua,* because they fear being heard and receiving who knows what trials! If it is because of humility that they dare not say it, the Saint agreed, although she did observe that "He Who gives them love enough to ask for such a stern method of proving it will give them love enough to endure it" (ch. XXXII).

IMPORTANCE OF THIS GIFT

"Before explaining all its advantages, I will show you all that you are offering here, lest later you should exclaim that you had been deceived and had not understood what you were saying . . . It seems very easy to say that we will surrender our will to someone, until we try it and realize that it is the hardest thing we can do . . ." It can happen at times that superiors ask things of us beyond our strength, because they do not realize our capacity. But God knows everything, and He will never demand anything we cannot do without the help of His grace, which will never be wanting.

This is one of the most beautiful pages in St. Teresa's writings. "I wish to remind you what His will is. Do not fear that He will give you riches or pleasure or great honors or any such earthly things; His love for you is not so poor as that."

She left no doubt that there would be things to suffer; there is no human life without suffering: but it is part of God's plan. If He sends something to suffer, it is a sign of His predilection. Jesus passed this way; therefore, if a man is treated like Him, it is because he is loved by God: "He sets a very high value on what you give Him and wishes to reward you for it since He gives you His Kingdom while you are still in this life."

There is a definite connection between the gift of the will and His kingdom. When one is generous, God is generous with him.

"Would you like to see how He treats those who make this prayer from their hearts? Ask His glorious Son, Who in the garden uttered it truthfully and resolutely. See whether the will of God was not accomplished in the trials, the sufferings, the insults, and the persecutions sent Him, until at last His life was ended on the cross. So you see, then, what God gave to Him He loved best."

What will be His pleasure for those He loves? Certainly their sanctification, and so He will give them occasions to enrich themselves, showing them the footsteps of His Son and inviting them to follow the same road. "These are His gifts in this world." One does not become a saint without suffering, but when we do not think of the suffering, when (above all) we do not analyze it, we can suffer more generously. In suffering one must look more at God than self and remember that He gives these gifts "in proportion to His love for us; He gives more

to those He loves most, and less to those He loves least."

Another rule is that suffering is always in proportion to love. "A soul who loves Him greatly . . . can suffer much for Him, whereas one who loves Him little will suffer little . . . Our love is the measure of the cross we can bear."

The Saint concluded the first part of this chapter by saying: "My whole aim in writing this book has been to incite us to yield ourselves entirely to our Creator, to submit our will to His, and to detach ourselves from all created things." St. Teresa had a double aim in this book: to encourage man to consecrate himself entirely to God by the gift of his will and to detach it from creatures. The two things are complementary; the first cannot stand without the second. It is not possible to give oneself completely to God, always to do His will, without keeping all created things in their proper place.

But now for the consequences of this generous gift. Teresa did not enumerate them successively in distinct paragraphs, but they can be worked out by combining parts of the text. The soul

1) prepares itself in the best way for perfect contemplation;

2) is led to total transformation, that is to the *state* of transformation;

3) becomes powerful over the heart of God and obtains whatever it asks for the good of the Church and of souls because God gives back, so to speak, its will and takes pleasure in doing its wishes.

THE HIGHEST DEGREE OF PRAYER

The total gift of the will is the necessary condition for reaching perfect contemplation: by this offering, "in a very short time, we shall find ourselves at the end of our journey and shall drink of the fountain of living water of which I spoke," but "unless we make a total surrender of our will to Our Lord, He will never allow us to drink of it." Note here how perfect contemplation is normally given to the soul which has made this surrender, for we know that for St. Teresa the foundation of living water was the prayer of union, or perfect contemplation as she said explicitly: "that water . . . is the perfect contemplation that you wished me to write about."

The prayer of quiet is an approach to the fountain, a help to reach unitive contemplation. If we correspond with this first gift by the total gift of our will, so that God may "do His will in all that concerns us", then He will give the living water. He

takes total possession of man who has put himself completely into His hands and often gives him this prayer of union—not always in the same measure, as we have observed in St. Thérèse —but He certainly gives it, while He gives it only by exception to those who have not yet made this complete gift.

At this point the Saint described a few characteristics of perfect contemplation. First, it is completely passive: the soul no longer contributes its own activity: "here we can do nothing of ourselves, either by working hard or by making plans, nor is it needful that we should. For everything else hinders and prevents us from saying *Fiat voluntas tua.*"

Then: "The more we show Him by our actions that the words we use to Him are not words of mere politeness, the more and more does Our Lord draw us to Himself and raise us above all earthly things, and above ourselves, in order to prepare us to receive great favors." In the prayer of union God can draw the soul so strongly that it almost loses contact with surrounding life. "Even in this life He rewards us unceasingly for this gift (of the will), which He values exceedingly. While we do not know for what more we could ask, His majesty never wearies of giving us fresh favors. Not content with having united such a soul to Himself, He begins to caress it, and reveals His secrets to it. He is pleased at its understanding what it has gained, and that it knows something of what He has in store for it. He deprives such a person of her exterior senses, lest they should disturb her. This we call rapture."

These are contemplative graces. Teresa spoke of them only briefly; later she would explain them extensively in the *Interior Castle* in the Vth and VIth *Mansions.* She wrote the *Castle* for spiritual directors and for those who experience such effects, so that they might be reassured when they see that they are not something strange. But here it did not seem necessary to her to speak of them in particular; it was enough to know that the other graces which can accompany perfect contemplation are only an intensification of the grace of the prayer of quiet, which was communicated by means of love, and that love was kindled more easily in one who is completely detached.

There is a close connection between progress in the life of perfection and development in the life of prayer. The divine light is diffused more abundantly in the center of the soul; as one grows more interior he finds himself immersed in greater light, and even becomes conscious of it and experiences it.

Therefore, the development of the spiritual life is, in a sense, closely related to the diverse kinds of prayer. It is true that the superior mystical prayers—of the Vth, VIth, and VIIth *Mansions* —are not an integral part of the development of the spiritual organism, because they are not explained by the activity of the Holy Spirit alone; still, completely developed grace "disposes" the soul for these fruitive unions.

In the Vth *Mansions* the union of the soul with God becomes total: from it flows a generous life in which one dies to himself to be reborn to divine life. In the two mansions following this grace of union develops to the point of invading him totally and becoming habitual.

While she described the riches of the last Mansions of the *Castle,* St. Teresa affirmed that such graces were not of themselves necessary for sanctity, and that God could bring souls to the perfect life, without mystical union. The Holy Spirit's enlightenment, inseparable from sanctity, can be barely perceived at the same time it deeply penetrates the life of the soul which has reached that state of perfection.

After all, the goal of the most elevated mystical graces is perfect love between the soul and God, and whoever truly loves is more drawn to give than to receive. Hence, precious as mystical union is, St. Teresa always preferred union of conformity, moral perfection; she wished souls to dispose themselves for divine union by the perfect gift of themselves, by perfect conformity of their will with the will of God.

So we return again to the *gift of the will.*

"In every way and in every matter, do Thy will in me, O Lord, as Thou pleasest. If Thou desirest to give me crosses, grant me strength, and let them come: if Thou wouldst send me persecutions, shame, poverty, illness—I stand ready, nor will I turn away from thee, O my Father! I have no right to flee from them, since Thy Son has offered Thee my will with the rest, in the name of all of us. Let Thy kingdom come to me, as Thy Son has asked of Thee, so that I may fulfill Thy will. Dispose of me as of Thine own, according as Thou willest."

St. Teresa, knowing her weakness and yet the greatness of the gift she should make, asked God to help her: Give me Thy kingdom, that is, the first form of contemplative prayer—the prayer of quiet of which she has already spoken—in such a way that I surrender myself in simply everything, fully trusting in

You, and You may be able to dispose of me as You wish, for I am Yours, I do not belong to myself any longer.

After thus recalling what this gift consists of, she showed its second consequence, the transformation of the soul into God by love.

"What power this gift has! Made with due determination, it cannot fail to draw the Almighty to become one with our baseness and to transform us into Himself, thus uniting the creature with its Creator. Are you not well repaid?"

She clearly stated thus that the consequence of the total gift of our will to God is transformation. This really means the state of transformation which St. John of the Cross places at the summit of perfection, the state in which the soul is divinized and acts in a divine manner because the will of God has taken complete possession of the soul and moves it in all and through all. In the VIIth *Mansions* St. Teresa described the spiritual atmosphere in which this transformation of the soul is completed.

We know from St. John of the Cross that there is question of a transformation of the will, which is transformed into the will of God, since it loves only what God loves. Hence it is an "affective" transformation of the soul. But if until now man was moved simply by the help of grace in the direction of the will of God, when he becomes perfect in love he is moved in this sense by the Holy Spirit. His transformation, therefore, besides being affective, in a certain sense is also effective, because his acts are divinized by the divine motion. This effective transformation proceeds from an intimate union which he feels in the depth of his being.

But the end of everything is always love, and St. Teresa said that God's purpose in giving these graces is to strengthen us to imitate Christ in suffering. The soul pressed by love, though appreciating immensely God's gifts, does not stop at them, but is always anxious to give: he feels an immense need of repaying the divine generosity.

"To love, to be loved, to make love loved", this is the longing of the soul perfect in charity. St. Thérèse had reached this union and this is the state in which God wishes to place our souls also, but we must keep the door open by holding completely to the will of God.

St. Teresa said that God is pleased to do the will of the soul: "His friendship with her becomes to intimate that not only does He restore her will to her but He gives her His own as well.

For now that He is making a friend of her, He is pleased to allow her to rule with Him 'by turns' as we say. So he does what the soul asks of Him, just as the soul does what He commands, only in a far more complete manner, for being almighty He can do what He wills and He always wills to do this."

We find similar beautiful sentiments in St. John of the Cross at the beginning of the third book of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel:*

"The functions of the memory and of the other faculties in this state are all divine; for, when at last God possesses the faculties and has become the entire master of them, through their transformation into Himself, it is He Himself Who moves and commands them divinely, according to His Divine Spirit and will; and the result of this is that the operations of the soul are not distinct, but all that it does is of God, and its operations are divine, so that . . . he that is joined unto God becomes one spirit with Him.

". . . God alone moves the faculties of these souls to do those works which are meet, according to the will and ordinance of God, and they cannot be moved to do others; and thus the works and prayers of these souls are always effectual" (ch. II, nn. 8 and 10).

V

GOD'S GIFT: THE EUCHARIST

"Our daily bread"

An attentative reader of the *Way of Perfection* quickly notices that St. Teresa devoted three entire chapters to the petition *Give us this day our daily bread.* And still more striking is her interpretation of this petition. For her our daily bread is the Eucharist, and that explains her insistence: since she wanted to trace the way to perfection, she had to show the importance of the Blessed Sacrament in the pursuit of perfection. St. Teresa, a realist, understood the value of the Eucharist: first of all, the real presence of Jesus, and then, Holy Communion.

The first of these three chapters treats of the gift of Jesus' presence among us and the two following chapters of sacramental communion and spiritual communion.

EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE

In the first chapter (33) we note Teresa's effort to unite its thought with the preceding part on the total gift of the will to God; then she went on to the love of the heavenly Father and of Jesus Himself in giving the Eucharist, and finally the place It occupies in the Teresian concept of life.

Each of the first two paragraphs expressed the same thought: Jesus, in exhorting us to say *fiat voluntas tua,* has made us give a great deal, for He has us offer all our will to God's good pleasure, which is the same as a total gift of oneself and implies a reform of life.

Practical examples are given: ". . . if anyone were to tell some wealthy, pampered person that it is God's will for him to moderate his eating so that others, who are dying of hunger, shall have at least bread to eat, he will discover a thousand reasons for not understanding this but interpreting it in his own way. If one tells a person who speaks ill of others that it is God's will that he should love his neighbor as himself, he will lose patience and no amount of reasoning will convince him. . ." (ch. XXXIII).

"What would be the case, then, if Our Lord had not done most of what was necessary by means of the remedy He has given us?" Because He knows that this gift of our will is hard—and yet so important because it is the means to perfect charity—he desires to motivate us in making it by giving us a perpetual sign of His love.

The great manifestation of His love is in the Incarnation and in the Eucharist which perpetuates the Incarnation. The soul who lives by faith knows that Christ remains there to help us, that He invites us to Himself to give us strength, seeming to repeat to us: "Come to Me all you that . . . are burdened; I will give you rest" (Matt. XI, 28).

In the second paragraph the Saint explained her thought more clearly: "The good Jesus knew how important it was for us to give to His Father what He had offered on our behalf, and yet how difficult it would be for us to do so . . . because of our natural inclination to base things and our want of love and courage. He saw that we needed to see His love to be aroused, and that not once but every day, and it must have been for this reason that He resolved to remain with us."

The Eucharist is a manifestation, not only of Jesus' love, but also of the heavenly Father's. The Saint noted that Jesus asks the Father to be allowed to remain with us because He wishes to do only the Father's will and be humbly subject to Him: "He wanted, as it were, to ask leave of His Father" for the gift of His permanent presence in the Eucharist. And in granting the permission the Father does indeed show His love for us, for He knows we shall renew upon the Eucharist the thankless treatment we gave His Son when He was on earth.

St. Teresa's catholic instinct appears in her appreciation of the Blessed Sacrament. She could not agree with the theologians who maintained that at a certain point in the mystical life one should leave Jesus. She could not conceive life without Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament.

SACRAMENTAL COMMUNION

Chapter XXXIV speaks about the meaning which Teresa gave the words *our bread,* that is, the Eucharistic bread, meaning not only Holy Communion but also the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, for He nourishes us by both. She wishes us to ask that Jesus remain with us always.

Speaking here to Carmelite nuns, whom in their Constitutions

she told to trust that God would always provide for their necessities if they were good frugal religious, she exhorted them to disregard the other sense of these words which exegetes must consider, namely, material bread.

After that she turned to the way we should receive Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. It is interesting to note that the method suggested is supported by theology and is characteristic of a contemplative—preparing the way for Jesus to reveal Himself to the soul so that it might taste Him. It is a method based on theology for it is an exercise of the theological virtues which put us in direct contact with God: faith and love. Both of these are activated by the will and in that sense are within our power.

FAITH

To receive the grace which God wishes to bestow, one has to be receptive, and faith is the best means to it. St. Teresa spoke of herself when she mentioned a person who had such a living faith that she "saw"—she means with the eyes of faith—Our Lord coming to her in Communion and smiled at the thought of those who wanted to have lived in Palestine in His day to see Him. If she possessed Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, there was nothing more to desire, her faith told her.

The exercise of faith depends on our will in a double manner: because we can make acts of faith when we wish and because the adhesion of the mind to the truth depends on our will. We believe because we wish to believe and we can bring to this act a will inflamed with love; then faith becomes "a certainty dark but sure".

St. Teresa invites her readers to concentrate all their attention at Communion time on the act of faith: to see Christ truly entering into them to keep them company, to be their food. This is not an imaginary picture such as one can make during his meditation, nor is it simply His operative presence by which He keeps man always under His influence; in Communion Jesus is really present with His most holy Humanity. Therefore, the Saint noted, this is not the time to pray before a picture of Him, but to "see" Jesus really in us and to entertain ourselves with Him. St. Teresa wished us to cultivate this gaze of faith diligently so that it may become ever more loving.

LOVE

Beside faith there must be love. Love of desire, of repentance,

of union. The essential thing is that it open the soul wide to the great Eucharistic gift. God comes as doctor, and one can expose to Him all his spiritual necessities.

At Communion time we are offered actual grace to love more. Jesus comes to unite Himself to us; so the right thing to do is to desire union, to ask Him for it. It is the motion of the Holy Spirit which makes this possible and the theological virtues put us in the best dispositions to follow His movement.

It is no wonder that God makes Himself felt in a soul full of faith and love and gives it a great desire to be generous in His service. The feeling is not essential, but we shall be happy if at that time God gives us a grace of union, though keeping ourselves in great resignation. If we are faithful to recollection, Teresa wrote, "His coming will not be so hidden but that, in many a way, He will reveal Himself to you."

SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

We call it "spiritual communion" to distinguish it from sacramental communion, for the sacrament is not actually received in it. It is a great act of desire by which one invites Jesus into his heart and goes to meet Him.

Christ in the Eucharist brings not only the physical presence of His Humanity—which is certainly a special blessing, though from a spiritual point of view not the most important—but also an increase of grace, according to one's love.

Christ can give this fruit by His physical presence — in sacramental communion — but this He does when one has a great desire for Him to come into the soul to nourish it, or, in other words, make the so-called spiritual communion.

Spiritual communion can be made by an act of simple desire in a moment, by a simple cry of the soul; or more at length, with an express formula of preparation and thanksgiving.

St. Teresa recommended this practice heartily, but it must be employed with good judgment. It is excellent if one feels inspired to multiply these acts, but the soul must not tie itself down; there are other ways of begging God to visit and work in us.

We should note in this regard that St. Teresa was thinking mainly of assistance at Mass. When one cannot receive sacramental Communion let him nevetheless dispose himself as if he could, and when the priest communicates make a spiritual communion, with a fervent act of desire for Jesus to come and nourish love in him. But though Teresa spoke explicitly of

participation at Holy Mass, we understand from the motives she gave that her recommendation holds also for occasions outside of Mass. Nor should one feel alarm because he experiences some difficulty with the practice: "Do not be disturbed if you cannot succeed at first; perhaps the devil may be filling your heart with repugnance and trouble because he sees what loss he would suffer by your acquiring this habit. Though he may try to make you believe that you could practise greater devotion in other ways, do not be dissuaded from this: Our Lord thus tests your love for Him" (ch. XXXV).

Many do not consider spiritual communion important because they have never practiced it well. It is important to remember that any desire of union puts new vigor into the soul and, therefore, it is well to profit by it.

In the second part of the chapter we find an ardent exclamation of the Saint which reveals her desire to see Jesus honored in His sacrament. In her day heretics attacked and profaned the Eucharist, and her spirit of reparation made her feel great joy each time she founded a new monastery and opened a new tabernacle. The presence of Jesus is always an occasion of grace for souls.

VI

FORGIVING

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive. . ."

Chapter XXXVI treats of man's reflecting God's mercy, that is his love of others in imitation of the way God has always loved him despite all his weaknesses.

PARDON

After a brief explanation of the petition, St. Teresa named what it is that we have to forgive. Sometimes God has permitted the saints to suffer great injuries or calumnies, and He could do the same to us to make us practise humility; but these are rare and, therefore, it is not so much upon these that Teresa wished to fix our attention, but on others which happen much more frequently. She noted that there are little things in life which cause more suffering than great ones, because they touch us from closer at hand and more frequently; for the most part, these are slight injustices or hurts received in living together, differences of character, lack of attention, of delicacy, of education, etc. These offenses may come from without, that is, from our surroundings but they also come from within—from our self-love, "points of honor".

St. Teresa spoke of the pardon of offenses as a great act of love, which God considers important, making His pardon depend on it: "What value God places on our loving and keeping peace with one another! The good Jesus might have put everything else before our love for one another, and said: 'Forgive us, Lord, because we are doing a great deal of penance, or because we are praying often, and fasting, and because we have left all for Thy sake and love Thee fervently.' But He has never said: 'Because we would lose our lives for Thy sake'; or any of these other things which He might have said. He simply says: 'Because we forgive.' "

The quality of forgiveness is a guarantee that one living a life of prayer is on the right road; it is a test of the authenticity of contemplative graces. St. Teresa said she had found that contemplatives were always ready to pardon and love those who caused them difficulties. And she gave the reason: one growing in union with God becomes more and more aware of both His mercy and his own unworthiness, with the result that he acquires a merciful attitude towards others.

We find this quality in all the saints, and, in our day, St. Thérèse has been a special messenger of merciful Love. She saw how God takes the initiative in His goodness; that gave her strength to overcome all the difficulties she encountered in the monastery.

A GENERAL GLANCE

Chapter XXXVII glances for a moment at the ground already covered and at that still remaining.

St. Teresa recalled that the first petitions of the *Pater noster* afforded her an opportunity to discuss all the degrees of prayer from meditation to the prayer of union, the fount of living water. "Thus far in the *Pater noster* our Lord has taught us the whole method of prayer and of high contemplation, from the very beginnings of mental prayer, to Quiet and Union" (ch. XXXVII).

Now she was to use the remaining petitions to explain the effects of prayer. "Here our Lord is gradually showing us the effects produced by prayer and contemplation, when they are of God." When prayer is authentic it cannot fail to produce such effects.

Between prayer and virtue there is the relation of cause and effect. The effect of prayer is love; if this is produced, the prayer is good, otherwise it is weak. The love itself is twofold: love of God and love of neighbor. Love of God consists in saying always more deeply *fiat voluntas tua* and meaning it both actively and passively: passively, accepting all God does in us and about us as invitations He sends us to go to Him; and actively, generously doing all He asks of us.

For St. Teresa the practical test for seeing whether a soul truly loves God is charity towards his neighbor, a love based on his relations with God, not his personal qualities. Christ considers done to Himself all we do for our neighbor; it is in fraternal charity that the love of God becomes tangible.

The distinctive characteristic of the Christian is fraternal charity. The only instrument of the apostolate with which one goes to the very depth of the soul of those to be converted—and which, therefore, is efficacious—is that attitude of deep love which never fails, notwithstanding ingratitude.

If we treat our neighbor with the same delicacy we would use towards Christ, we possess the best proof that our love for God is genuine. Even St. Thomas says that if we cannot have meta-

physical certainty of being in God's grace, we can have moral certainty, and this comes from testing our love for our neighbor. This is one of the most beautiful things St. Teresa said.

There are degrees of love of neighbor, said the Saint, but in all of them there is present the pardoning of wrongs. "Those who are perfect will surrender their wills like the perfect souls they are and will forgive others with the perfection that has been described, while as for us, sisters—well—we do our best and our Lord accepts it all." If one cultivates a complete surrender of himself to God's will which will show itself through fraternal charity, St. Teresa assured us that God will recompense him in his prayer and bring him into His intimacy.

In this way the Saint hinted at the theme of the next chapters: our life is a continual search for divine intimacy. But, while we are on this earth, we are surrounded by difficulties and temptations of the devil. Fragile as we are, we truly need protection from evil.

VII

TEMPTATIONS

"And lead us not into temptation"

Under this heading Teresa wrote, not only of temptation, but of trials in general. But the examples she gave are of temptations, inasmuch as the trials are presented as occasions of not going towards God as directly as one ought. She said there is no need to be afraid of them: little by little as souls become more perfect, they have less fear of temptation and trials, because they know that love develops in suffering.

St. Thérèse, during the period in which her sister Celine carried the heavy cross of caring for their gravely ill father, encouraged her by reminding her that trials are actually a sign of God's love for us. Therefore perfect souls should desire them rather than ask to be freed from them, but they must also ask that temptation may not harm them.

This petition of the *Pater noster* might also be worded: "O God, do not let me surrender to temptation"; one does not ask not to have any temptations, but only not to be deceived by them. In fact the enemy, profiting from the complexity of human nature, manages to keep temptation hidden until it has done harm. When a man has really given himself to our Lord he cannot be deceived, but as long as he has inordinate self-love, fallen nature has a tendency to be blind to temptation.

FALSE SPIRITUAL CONSOLATION

After outlining the meaning of this petition, St. Teresa explained some temptations into which the soul can fall if it is not alert. She was speaking here mainly of those who live the life of prayer.

The devil can deceive us into believing that the consolations we have in prayer come from God when it is he who is producing them. St Teresa makes little of this temptation: when a person is humble and sincere, it cannot hurt him, for if he believes the consolations are from God, he will feel impelled to thank Him, and the enemy seeing that he is losing his time will end by leaving him in peace. The Saint recommended humility, however. One should not think he has any right to special consolations in prayer; they cannot be procured by his own efforts and if he

seeks them he is preparing himself to be deceived.

I have always been struck by what Teresa said at the end of Chapter II of the IVth *Mansions* of the *Interior Castle.* After teaching how one prepares for the prayer of quiet, she recommended: "While acting as do those who have dwelt in the *Mansions* already described, also have humility and again humility! It is by humility that our Lord allows Himself to be conquered so that He will do all we ask of Him, and the first way in which you will see if you have humility is that if you have it you will not think you merit these favors and consolations of God or are likely to get them for as long as you live." Not that the Saint was contradicting what she had already said: we remember that preceding chapters of the *Way of Perfection* have urged us—as far as lies in us, but without presumption—to prepare for contemplation and await it from God Who will give it when and as He wills. The important thing is to know that there is no need to desire spiritual consolations; one who does not seek them is in the best disposition to receive the mercy of God, and, if he is always content with what God gives him, he cannot be deceived.

Another temptation, more serious and common, in persons who aspire to perfection and to acquiring virtues, is to believe they possess them. This temptation is much more subtle and more dangerous than the other, because there a person believes he is receiving while here he thinks he is giving to God. He believes that he has rights over Him; he does not exert himself to acquire virtue for he thinks he has it already, and so he grows weak.

Teresa drew from her own experience the counsels she gave for this case. She had many difficulties in practising virtue, both from her physical condition and from the external circumstances of her life.

In the midst of all these difficulties, generous as she was, Teresa practised virtue; and yet it is beautiful to see with what humility she confessed her weakness. "Sometimes I feel such courage that there is nothing I should fear to do in God's service, and I find, when it comes to the proof, that I am brave as regards some matters—yet, next day, I should not venture to kill an ant for Him if I met with any opposition. Sometimes I care nothing if people talk or complain of me, and very often, indeed, it has even given me pleasure. Yet there are occasions when a single word distrubs me, and I long to leave this world, for everything in it disgusts me. . . Who can say that he possesses any virtue,

or that he is rich. . . ? No, sisters: let us think we are poor. . ." (ch. XXXVIII).

It would be a mistake to lean on our own presumed virtues as if they were a solid foundation. St. Teresa Margaret, for example, struggled to the end of her life to acquire virtue, even when she had already entered the mystical life.

St. Teresa said that to remedy this temptation one should pray and nourish low sentiments of oneself, recalling that the virtues are gifts of God. St. Thérèse gives a good commentary on the holy Mother's thought when she says that the virtues are treasures which the heavenly Father has put into the hands of His child to use, but they always remain His.

In fact, when the virtues grow in the soul, they always grow because of a deepening of sanctifying grace for the virtues are "habits" of the soul. If we consider single acts of virtue, we know that for each of them an actual grace is necessary; to perform an act of heroic virtue, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are needed: therefore, of ourselves we are incapable of anything. The desires we feel at times in prayer are good but are only the beginning of virtue; for virtue to be effective it must be put into action.

The Saint gave examples: the devil can make us believe we possess patience, but put to the test, all this patience goes up in smoke. Or we can form the habit of saying and believing that we want nothing and do not care about anything, when it is not really so. Therefore Teresa recommended vigilance and assured us that when a soul really acquires one virtue perfectly all the others come with it. That is the reason why spiritual writers advise concentrating all one's efforts on one virtue: laboring to acquire one, we labor to acquire them all.

FALSE HUMILITY

In Chapter XXXIX St. Teresa continued to discuss hidden temptations, as a false humility which throws the soul into disquiet. Humility is the virtue which puts things in their place, in order. Our place before God is that of children. When Christ wanted to teach humility He called a child and showed it to the Apostles saying, "Unless you become as little children you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." He wants us to be conscious of our littleness and weakness, but in the manner of the child who is afraid of a dog and throws itself into its mother's

arms. From that safe refuge it looks fearlessly at the beast, and we can do the same in regard to God and say: "Dear Lord, how I need You! I am hoping for everything from You!"

Sometimes distrustful sentiments flow simply from our own oversensitiveness and can be overcome, but the devil also may have a hand in them. Depression is an open door for him. He knows that distrubance lowers our power to love, and his aim is precisely to keep souls from progressing in the ways of love. He uses this snare especially on souls he cannot make fall into sin.

Therefore, the Saint put us on our guard: "Beware of a certain kind of humility suggested by the devil, which is accompanied by great anxiety about the gravity of our past sins. There are many ways in which he disturbs us by this means so that in time we withdraw from Communion and give up our private prayer, because the devil suggests to us that we are not worthy to engage in it" (ch. XXXIX).

Sister Marie of the Eucharist (Marie Guerin) became a joyous and serene person but first passed through these temptations even to the point of leaving Holy Communion. Her cousin, St. Thérèse, urged her in a letter to trust and never to omit Communion for these fears.

"When we come to the Most Holy Sacrament," continued St. Teresa, "we spend the time during which we ought to be receiving grace in wondering whether we are properly prepared or not. The thing gets to such a pass that a soul can be made to believe that, through being what it is, it has been forsaken by God, and thus it almost doubts His mercy. Everything such a person does appears to her on the verge of evil, and all the service she renders, however good it may be, seems to her fruitless. She loses confidence and sits with her hands in her lap because she thinks she can do nothing well and that what is good in others is wrong in herself."

"Pay great attention, daughters, to what I am about to say. At one time it may be humility and a virtue to think ourselves so wicked, and at another time a very great temptation. I have had experience of this, so I know it is true. Humility, however deep it be, neither disquiets nor wearies nor disturbs the soul; it is accompanied by peace, joy and tranquillity. Although the sight of our wickedness grieves us and proves to us that we deserve to be in hell, and that everyone should hate us, yet, if our humility is true, this distress is accompanied by an interior peace

and joy of which we should not like to be deprived. Far from disturbing or depressing the soul, it enlarges it and makes it fit to serve God better. The other kind of distress only disturbs and upsets the mind and troubles the soul, so grievous is it. I think the devil is anxious for us to believe that we are humble, and, if he can, to lead us to distrust God."

What did the Saint tell us to do? "If you are ever in this state, turn your thoughts, as far as possible, from your own misery and think of the mercy of God and of His love and His sufferings for us." If you cannot do even this, the only thing left is to have patience and offer your suffering to God.

EXCESSIVE PENANCE

Another temptation regards penances—that is, those done outside obedience, for there is little danger of deception if they are controlled by obedience.

Corporal penances are good and must be good for us, otherwise St. Teresa would not have woven so much mortification into the life of her daughters. But they are only an accompaniment of internal giving. I knew a good Mistress of Novices who, when she noticed a novice wandering from obedience a little, immediately took all penances away from her, to make her understand that the gift of one's own will comes first. It would be wrong to render oneself incapable of fulfilling one's duties in order to do penance. Bodily penance should be limited according to our duties and our physique.

Therefore, the Saint did not approve of penances without obedience.

One who does a penance he has been forbidden is obviously deluded. His penance—according to a strong expression of St. John of the Cross[1] — would be the penance "of beasts".

EXAGGERATED CONFIDENCE

This temptation is the opposite of the one by which the soul lets itself be too depressed by its littleness; here it is too sure of itself and believes it will never fall again.

St. Teresa wanted us to be determined not to commit a single mortal sin or even a delibrate venial sin, however small; but, notwithstanding this, we ought never believe ourselves impec-

[1] St. John of the Cross, *Night*, I, VI, 1.

cable nor trust ourselves, but only God; otherwise we shall pay dearly. St. Thérèse had already reached sanctity when, in her beautiful exposition of fraternal charity[2] commenting on the passages of the gospel on charity, she mentions the many imperfect tendencies she experienced—though she had reached the state of perfection. This demonstrates that our nature is always wounded and carries within it the consequences of the original fall.

Finally, St. Teresa repeated: "Lead us not into temptation" and begged God to free us from hidden temptations. She then ended the chapter with a little observation full of good sense in regard to the temptations which one meets in the life of prayer: that the world marvels at seeing persons who live the interior life tempted and deluded, while it pays no attention to the temptations worldly people have.

[2] St. Thérèse, *Story of a Soul,* XI and X.

VIII

LOVE AND FEAR GOD

To the temptations with which the devil tries to delude and frighten souls, slowing them down on the way of perfection, St. Teresa opposed two remedies: love and fear. "Love will make us quicken our steps while fear will make us look where we are setting our feet so that we shall not fall" (ch. XL). The fear is not the servile fear of a slave who dreads displeasing his master lest he be punished, but filial—that of the child who does not want to give the least pain to the father he loves. St. John of the Cross makes this beautifully clear.[1]

LOVE IN CONTEMPLATIVES

Note how St. Teresa introduced the theme: since love is the great remedy against temptations, it is very important to have it and to know that we have it.

Here it is evident that the Saint, in contact with the theologians of her time and, having among her directors learned men like the famous Dominican, Father Bañez, was influenced by them to some extent. It was just after the close of the Council of Trent and the institution of the Roman Congregation of the Council to introduce its teaching and practice everywhere. The subject of grace had been treated in the Council and the question of the certainty of possessing it had been discussed. We can see traces of this here.

The Saint spoke with theological exactitude, her keen mind understanding that, since to possess grace and to have charity is the same thing, if one were certain of possessing love, he would also be certain of having grace. However, theologians do teach—and the theologians of Salamanca are perhaps the ones who have thrown the greatest light on the point—that if we cannot have mathematical certitude, based on evidence, we can have moral, practical certainty. And the Saint did add: "But sisters, there are some indications which are in no way secret but so evident that even a blind man could see them. There is no secret about them; although you may not wish to hear them, they cry aloud . . ."

This is the teaching of St. Thomas, commented on by the

[1] St. John of the Cross, *Canticle*, XXVI, 3.

Salamanticenses, who teach that the soul can have practical proofs of possessing love and therefore of being in the state of grace, in such a way as to proceed with serenity.

Teresa gave some of these signs: "Those who really love God love all good, seek all good, help forward all good, praise all good, and invariably join forces with good men and help and defend them. They love only truth and things worthy of love." They are souls whom nothing interests any more except the things of God; this is evident proof that they belong to God and have no attachment to the world.

It is a pleasure to notice that, speaking of this tendency toward all that is good, toward what concerns the glory of God, St. Teresa names works of the most exquisite charity, that is, helping one's neighbor in things that refer to the service of God. In the *Interior Castle* she indicates charity for our neighbor as proof that we possess the love of God.[2]

One who is occupied only with the things of God cannot be interested in those of the world any longer. "Do you think it is possible that anyone who really and truly loves God can love vanities, riches, worldly pleasures or honors? Can he engage in strife or feel envy? No; for his only desire is to please the Beloved. Such persons die with longing for Him to love them and so they will give their lives to learn how they may please Him better. Will they hide their love? No: if their love for God is genuine love they cannot. Look at St. Paul or the Magdalen—in three days *he* found he was sick with love, but she knew it the first day. And how sure they were of it! A love for God may be great or small: and it shows itself according to its strength. If it is weak it is little seen, and if it is strong it appears more clearly; but small or great, love for God can never be concealed." This love, then, rouses in the soul the single preoccupation: God! When she finds this sign in herself, for all practical purposes she is certain she has the love of God.

The Saint was speaking to contemplatives and insisted that their love must not be weak, it must be strong; it is the substratum of contemplation, and a certain intensity of love is always supposed by the contemplative light which makes one penetrate into God by experience of love, not by ideas. St. John of the Cross, speaking of the spiritual marriage, emphasized that this state supposes a strong love, acquired by the soul under

[2] St. Teresa of Jesus, *Interior Castle,* V, iii, 8.

the divine influence.[3]

This must be manifested by a great interior drive toward the things of God. This is a guarantee that the contemplative graces which the soul receives truly come from God.

This certainty is very important because the devil tries to raise vain fears; he is always a sower of disturbance, because that keeps a person from complete self-possession and concentration on God. Thus the devil, if he cannot make a person sin, tries at least to retard him, and that he does in two ways:

1) by inspiring fear of a life of prayer and
2) by lowering our idea of God's goodness.

THE NOURISHMENT OF LOVE

If love is so important, how are we to make it grow? One great help is the conviction that our love is returned. When the soul seeks God, much more does He seek the soul;[4] if the soul loves God, much more does the Lord love it. Our love, said St. Teresa, is "built on the firm foundation of a love which is returned . . . And that it is returned we cannot doubt, for the bitter sorrows, the trials and blood-shedding which cost our Lord His life, were known to men, and prove His love beyond all question."

Revelation teaches us that the Incarnation, grace, the sacraments, the Eucharist, are obvious signs of the great love of God for us. And these mysteries which are taught by the catechism and continually recalled by the liturgy are a strong stimulus to love of God. Let us call attention to the union between dogma and mysticism: on one side the certainty of faith, on the other the contemplative experience which drives one to penetrate into those mysteries.

Many are the advantages of perfect love, but the Saint indicated one especially: the tranquillity of the soul in facing death. "May His Majesty be pleased to grant us this before He takes us from this life, for it will be a great thing at the hour of death, to realize that we are to be judged by Him Whom we have loved above all things. We may feel safe concerning the acquittal of our debts: we shall not be going into a foreign country but into our fatherland, for it belongs to Him Whom we love so dearly, and Who loves us in return."

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[3] St. John of the Cross, *Canticle,* XXX, 11.

[4] St. John of the Cross, *Flame,* III, 28.

And then Teresa's apostolic spirit reminded her of those who do not live by this love and made her pity their sad lot—a new spur to live a life of perfect love.

Concluding the chapter she mentioned the death of one who has reached the fullness of the spiritual life: "Let us not try to pamper ourselves, daughters: we are well enough off here—it is only one night in a bad inn, thank God! Let us force ourselves to do penance in this life. How sweet death will be to her who has expiated all her sins and who needs no purgatory!" She meant the soul who has reached the transformation of love, who at times, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, feels a longing for heaven, and whose death is produced not so much by a physical cause as by one of those impulses of love which finally separates the soul from the body, as St. John of the Cross said so well.[5] And St. Teresa: "She may begin to enjoy glory even in this world, and will fear nothing, but will be in perfect peace."

FEAR OF GOD

The other weapon against temptations is the fear which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, like wisdom. When this fear is perfect, love is perfect too. Teresa followed the same order in explaining it as she did for love: its manifestation, the means for acquiring it, and its benefits.

Fear does not mature suddenly; only gradually does it become robust and strong. "But when souls . . . are raised to contemplation . . . both their love and fear of God are very evident even in their outward conduct" (ch. XLI).

Since the Saint was writing mainly for contemplatives, she described the characteristics which fear assumes in these souls, already become intimate friends of God. "Whoever watches such persons narrowly will find that they are never careless, for God upholds them, so that, whatever they might gain by it, they would not knowingly commit one venial sin—as for mortal sin, they dread it like fire," for in contemplation there is the special help of the Holy Spirit Who guides and sustains the soul.

She said they would not *knowingly* commit one venial sin, that is deliberately, consciously. And the same is true of deliberate imperfections, for in practice we should not make a distinction between venial sin and imperfection, though theologically there is a difference.

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[5] St. John of the Cross, *Flame,* I 30.

There are venial sins which escape our notice: "You must also be extremely vigilant about venial sins. I am speaking about misdeeds which are deliberate, for who does not constantly lapse into inadvertent errors?" There is question, naturally, of little things which do not displease God. "It is one thing to commit a sin knowingly and after long deliberation, and quite another to do it so suddenly that to commit the sin and to know it seem one and the same thing." We have been taken by surprise; in our weakness and frailty "we hardly realize what we have done."

This can happen even to saintly souls. St. Teresa confessed a fault of this kind, committed one day during the last months of her life, when, feverish and wasted with disease as she was, she felt impatience at an indiscreet request of one of the sisters and showed it in the expression of her countenance. She accused herself of it to Mother Agnes in a little note rejoicing—in her exquisite humility—at having been seen imperfect.

We ought never to be shocked at our frailty: the smaller we are, provided we admit it, the more will God come to meet us and do His work Himself. Venial sins of this kind are often occasions of great virtue for the soul.

Voluntary venial sins are quite another thing. To do with eyes open the least thing we know God does not want would be a horrible thing. "From willfully committing any sin, however small, may God deliver us! . . . Is such a sin as this a little one? I think not; I think it is very, very serious," from love's point of view.

Theologians say that voluntary venial sin cools charity in the soul. Charity's fervor is a firm will to please God; voluntary venial sins is the opposite: the will stops its flight towards God, or at least lowers it. So a fault can be very small but have serious consequences. Therefore, one must be firmly resolved to commit no voluntary fault.

HOW THE FEAR OF GOD IS GAINED

"Sisters, if you wish to gain this fear of God, think how serious a thing it is to offend God, turn it over often in your minds. . . ."

St. Ignatius had good reason to place the meditation on sin in the first part of his Exercises; it is precisely by considering what displeases God that we shall acquire this fear, and love of God will develop in us. "Much care is needed if this fear is to be planted in the soul; though, if one has true love, it is quickly acquired." The fear of God is the flowering of that love which

wishes to cling completely to the will of God. A soul who loves God fears to go contrary to the divine will even in the least thing; therefore, this holy fear is a sign of the love of God.

The filial fear of God bears great fruit in man. First, it puts hell under his feet, because the devils can no longer harm him. Their aim is to draw him away from God by sin and this they cannot do if he is determined not to offend Him, cost what it may.

A holy liberty of spirit is born in such a soul.

Before he reached this determination he had to be continually on the watch because any encounter might have been an occasion of sin for him. His fear was spiritual, yes, but not perfectly and solely filial: he was still a little afraid of displeasing others and this made him somewhat clumsy and constrained; now he can be less timid. He has no human respect because he does not fear showing that he is all God's, and acts with full freedom. St. Teresa left us a beautiful example of this freedom from constraint in her own life, for everyone knows how simple, affable and natural she was with those she dealt with.

"When we find that we have this fixed resolve, we need not be so timid and strict with ourselves, for our Lord and the good habits we have formed will aid us not to offend Him. We may now act with a holy liberty and may associate with anyone we meet. We may even prefer to be with the worldly, for, though, before we felt this genuine fear of God, they would have proved a poison destructive to our souls, yet now, when we see the contrast there is between us, their company will often strengthen our good resolutions and make us love God better and thank Him for having delivered us from danger. If, in the past, you fostered their weaknesses, now you will help them by forcing them to restrain themselves in your presence, for they will pay you this compliment unasked . . .

"As far as you can, without offending God, try to be genial and to behave in such a way with those you have to deal with, that they may take pleasure in your conversation and may wish to imitate your life and manners, instead of being frightened and deterred from virtue."

IX

DESIRE FOR HEAVEN

"But deliver us from evil. Amen."

One may ask to be delivered from evil, for Christ Himself taught us to ask for it. St. Teresa noted this, and desired to be exempt, but we shall see what she meant by evil.

To understand her interpretation we have to remember the point in the spiritual life which she had reached when she was writing the *Way*. If I may give my opinion, I believe that if she had written fourteen or fifteen years later, she would not have spoken of "evil" as referring to earthly life, for then, having reached the state of spiritual marriage which she describes so well in the *VIIth Mansions,* her thought in regard to the present life would have undergone a change.

The *Way* was written in 1562, when she had not yet reached the spiritual marriage; she was in the state of spiritual betrothal,[1]

[1] St. Teresa compares the three stages of the soul's spiritual progress in the mystical union, to the three periods of the nuptial union: the first meetings, the betrothal and the marriage.

St. John of the Cross uses the same allegorical language. In his teaching "the unitive way has two stages. The first, the spiritual betrothal, is designated 'the perfect and total *yes* which the soul says to the will of God', the perfect 'consent' with which the will adheres not only to what God commands, but also to what He desires, cost what it may. God answers this *yes* by giving the soul perfect virtues; but these are still not enough to 'arm' the sensible part fully and the soul, though wholly given to God with her will, cannot yet always manage to draw her sensibility with her. The 'transformation' of the soul therefore is limited to the will, of which God is now master and often comes to 'visit' His 'betrothed' with contemplation which has now become luminous.

He alone can introduce her into the spiritual marriage. Here the transformation becomes 'total': not only the will, but all the faculties are impelled by the love of God which has become the soul's only motive in all it does; the sensibility is now no longer rebellious, but joins the spirit in a harmonious concert of all the faculties glorifying God. To love is the only exercise of the soul, and to love that God Whom she feels within her as the principle which moves her.

She says with St. Paul: 'I live now not I, but Christ lives in me' and Christ shows her in the contemplative light the grandeurs of the Incarnation and of the Redemption. The Spouse of the Incarnate Word should know Him intimately and with Him His works, to which

a state which is still subject to miseries, on account of which she desired to be freed from the evils of life and to go to heaven.

Teresa spoke of both physical and moral evils, and said decidedly (Escorial MS) that we do not mean to ask God to free us from the former, that is hardships, sickness, suffering, etc., which can even be of great advantage to us. Persons of the world may do this, but for a soul of prayer there is no question of asking exemption from these sufferings, for she knows how to make a treasure of them. It is from the moral miseries that such a soul asks to be freed; that is, our weakness before the divine invitations, an evil from which it is hard to be completely free while we are on this earth.

"What good shall we find in this life, sisters, in which we are deprived of our great Good and are absent from Him? Deliver me, O God, from this shadow of death; deliver me from all these trials; deliver me from all these pains; deliver me from all these changes. . . . Deliver me from all evil and be pleased to lead me to where all good things are to be found" (XLII). In her delicate desire not to give God the least displeasure, she would have preferred to be no longer in the present life where she could still offend God; she desired to go to heaven.

But this spontaneous desire disappeared when she was established in the state of transforming union. While writing the *Way* St. Teresa was like the soul described by St. John of the Cross at the beginning of the *Canticle*,[2] who seeks union with God and, desiring nothing but to love Him, asks to be freed from what keeps her from loving Him fully. Therefore the evil from which she asks to be freed is life itself, in which God can still be lost, and which does not permit us to enjoy our Lord continually.

The Saint spoke expressly of those who have tasted God in contemplation, an enjoyment which spurs them to glorify God and desire death as the means to reach the fullness of life. "They have no desire to remain where there are so many hindrances to the enjoyment of so many blessings"; but seeing that they do

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she should be most closely associated. For the rest, nothing can associate her to the redemptive work more closely than love. Under the impulse of divine love, then, the soul succeeds in loving God with a 'divine' love, reaches equality of love and shares spiritually in the life of the Trinity" (from our art. THE DOCTOR in "Vita Carmelitana", n. IV, November 1942).

[2] St. John of the Cross, *Canticle*, I, 2: "Whither hast thou hidden thyself, O Beloved? . . . .

not die, they die because they cannot die.

St. Teresa reached the spiritual marriage in the year 1572 and lived in this state ten years. Fully matured, a man in this state receives the gift of the perfect dominion of God in his entire being which, though leaving in him the sense of his own littleness, makes virtue strong. He feels himself carried along by God, his weakness united to the strength of God; and thence he experiences deep peace. He does not think of himself any more, but of what he can do in Him Who strengthens him, as St. Paul says. He is confirmed in grace, assured that he will nevermore lose God's friendship. Knowing that by living on this earth in the midst of sufferings and sacrifices, he can acquire a higher degree of love, he desires to go on suffering, for the degree of love which he will have at the moment of death will remain for all eternity.

Saint Teresa certainly did not lack sufferings, physical or moral, in the last years of her life. She suffered even at the hands of her family: her cousin, Sister Mary Baptist, and her niece, Teresita, grew cold toward her. Despite all these sorrows, however, we see her soul in complete serenity, all surrendered to God. In her last *Relation* (1581, to Don Alonso Velazquez, Bishop of Osma) she portrayed her soul in her last years. It was established in deep peace. Her only desire, she said, was to do the will of God: "This submission to His will has such power over me that my soul desires neither death nor life save for short periods when it longs to see God." Only under the action of the Holy Spirit, when she was caught in the current of divine love, did she desire death to arrive at the fullness of life, at the complete possession of the Blessed Trinity—an experience described by St. John of the Cross in the *Flame*: "Break the web of this sweet encounter." But other than these impulses, Teresa lived in the fullest surrender. Earthly life, then, is no longer an evil, but the occasion of growing in love.

Saint Teresa closed her exposition of the last petition of the *Pater* with the desire for heaven. The life of heaven is simply the honor and glory of God and the thought of it made her exclaim here: "Oh, how different must be that life!" But for the soul who reaches transformation in God by love, even the present life becomes a heaven: it is eternal life begun.

CONCLUSION

On the last two pages of the *Way of Perfection* St. Teresa reviewed the whole book and then allowed her soul to express itself spontaneously.

What struck her in this retrospective glance was that God had made her understand what profound doctrine the *Pater noster* contained: the whole way of perfection, from the beginning to when the soul drinks of the fount of living water.

She understood the way of perfection as a contemplative way which led to the divine union towards which she orientated the souls God confided to her, though she knew that not all would receive the grace of contemplation in the same way. Therefore, when she mentioned perfect contemplation, she referred to the book of her *Life* to complete what she did not explain in much detail in the *Way*. In the latter she spoke of the lower grades of prayer including the prayer of quiet, thus opening a passage to the higher grades. If she had written the *Way* later on she would have referred to the *Interior Castle* where she synthesized the doctrine of prayer which she had already given in previous writings.

She was convinced that it had been our Lord Who had taught her what depths there were in the *Pater noster* and she praised Him for it: "See now, sisters, what trouble our Lord has saved me by teaching both you and me the Way which I began to outline to you, by showing me how much we ask for when we say this evangelical prayer. May He be for ever praised, for assuredly the idea never entered my mind that it contained such sublime secrets. As you have seen, it comprises the whole spiritual road, right from the beginning, until God absorbs the soul and gives it to drink abundantly of the fountain of living water which I told you was at the end of the road" (ch. XLII).

We too can now take a unified view of the beautiful structure of the *Way*. In the first three chapters St. Teresa sketched the ideal of union with God which is realized above all through continual prayer. But with all her experience and discernment she knew that to speak of contemplation without laying the sure foundation of virtue was to build on sand; therefore from chapter four to fifteen she spoke very practically of the virtues she considered basic: charity, detachment from everything and from oneself, humility. On this solid foundation she sketched the way, the degrees of prayer, affirming that if one prepared

himself with diligence, God would permit him to drink of that fount of living water which is contemplation. Not all would drink in the same way and in the same measure, but to all God would certainly give to drink: He would not satiate all at the rivers, but at least would give them some drops and never permit them to die of thirst.

It matters little whether God makes His action felt or not, but it is certain that if one disposes himself He will come to help him. God has not promised to give the prayer of quiet to everyone, but He will give His inspirations and it is quite probable that He will really give infused prayer if one continues to prepare himself by practising not only virtue but also prayer, really meaning it when he says: *fiat voluntas tua*!

The Saint was pleased with the book she had just finished. But she made little of her part in it and turned to glorifying God: "Well does His Majesty know that my understanding would not have been capable of it, had He not taught me what I have said." And if it was only right for the nuns who first received this masterpiece to be grateful to God, we too may thank Him for such a practical guide to spiritual perfection.

"Blessed and praised be the Lord, from Whom comes all the good that we speak and think and do." As we pursue the way of prayer we shall learn by experience that anything good there is in us comes from God, and we shall refer everything to Him alone.

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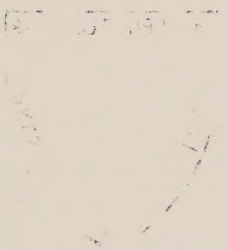

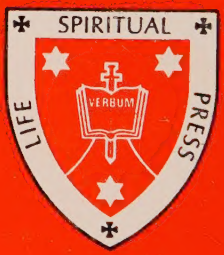
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